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BRITISH PLANNING AND PREPARATIONS TO RESIST INVASION ON LAND,

SEPTEMBER 1939 - SEPTEMBER 1940

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS:

This study focuses upon the many and varied problems encountered by the British in planning and preparing to resist invasion on land between the outbreak of World War Two in September 1939 and the reduction of the German threat to invade during the autumn of 1940. It does not underestimate the decisive influence of the Royal Navy, or of the R.A.F.'s heroic stand in the 'Battle of Britain', in deterring a potential invasion threat, but rather attempts to examine in some detail a major aspect that has hitherto been given very much a second place in most published works.

The subject is examined through an analysis of the periods of tenure of the three men who successively held the post of Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, Generals Kirke, Ironside and Brooke. The first period saw the early invasion scares and the subsequent adoption of General Kirke's 'Julius Caesar' Plan, a plan which, with minor changes, continued in force throughout the 'Phoney War' winter until May 1940, when the rapid pace of events following the opening of the German offensive in the West quickly proved it to be inadequate to meet the increased threat. The second period saw General Ironside embark upon a comprehensive reorganisation of Home Forces following the Dunkirk evacuation, but rapidly coming to grief when he attempted to replace 'Julius Caesar' with his own highly controversial plan of defence. Finally came the period when General Brooke, more fortunate to command at a time when the equipment situation was at last improving, began to implement his own ideas. With the Germans seen to be actively preparing to invade Britain, the time of maximum danger for Home Forces now occurred, culminating in the tensions of the 'Cromwell' alert and its immediate aftermath.

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INTRODUCTION

Invasion! Throughout history the threat, real or imagined, of an invasion or raid on the British Isles from foreign shores has been the almost constant concern and worry of the inhabitants of this island nation. From the days of King Alfred it was realised that the first line of defence against such a threat must be at sea - a navy of fighting ships that could intercept and destroy, or at least deter, any enemy sea-borne invasion force which attempted to cross the narrow seas, before it could set foot on British soil.

In more recent times the presence of a strong British navy in times of stress to mount guard over the waters of the Channel and North Sea has been the decisive factor in defeating or deterring invasion by a succession of powerful and aggressive foreign rulers. The sagas of the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, or of Napoleon's invasion barges lying at Boulogne from 1803 to 1805, penned in by a watchful Royal Navy waiting on the horizon, need no telling here. It was that great Elizabethan sea captain and adventurer, Sir Walter Raleigh, who, commenting on the question of the defence of England against invasion, in the time of King James, wrote:

"I hope that this question shall never come to triall, his Majesties many moveable Forts will forbid the experience. And although the English will no lesse disdaine, than any Nation under heaven can doe, to be beaten upon their owne ground or elsewhere by a forraigne enemy; yet to entertaine those that shall assaile us, with their owne beef in their bellies, and before they eate of our Kentish Capone, I take to be the wisest way. To doe which, his Majestie, after God, will imploy his good ships on the Sea, and not trust to any intrinchment upon the shore." ¹.

Yet at any time when the haunting spectre of invasion threatened to become a reality, the importance of land defences and preparations could not be neglected. There was always the very real danger that an enemy seaborne expedition might slip through the traditional naval cordon to spew heavily armed men in great numbers at any place along our miles of open beaches, estuaries and ports, and from there to spread quickly inland to wreak havoc and mayhem upon our peaceful English towns and countryside and impose their will upon a frightened government. Alternatively, smaller enemy forces might enter by a 'back door' by landing in Scotland, Wales, the West Country or Ireland, perhaps to join with an

1. Raleigh, Sir Walter: The History of the World, Bk. V, ch. i, § ix.

active 'Fifth Column' that would willingly help them to carry out their political or territorial ambitions in exchange for a settling of their grievances. The abortive landing by the French at Fishguard in Wales in February 1797 and the attempted French invasion of Ireland in August and September 1798 may be quoted as examples of the latter type of threat.

In the final reckoning, therefore, an invasion had always to be met, contained and defeated on land. Traditionally this was attempted by building static fortifications such as the stone Napoleonic Martello Towers of 1798-1809, the Thames and Medway fortifications, or the London forts of the 1890's, to cover strategically important points and to gain time to allow a relatively mobile regular field army to concentrate to 'throw the invaders back into the sea'. The civilian soldiers of the local Militia, the Volunteers, Yeomanry or Fencibles, fore-runners perhaps of the Home Guardsmen of the Second World War, have also played a vital role in any scheme of home defence. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, and indeed up to the end of the Great War, recurring international crises meant that much attention was given to planning and preparations on land to resist a possible enemy invasion, but, even so, these took very much a second place to the vital and decisive role of an immensely strong Royal Navy.

By the late 1930's, however, a new factor had come into the picture, that of airpower, which was to displace seapower as Britain's first line of defence and so bring to an end a long strategical era. Enemy aircraft now had the ability to sink or disable British ships by bombing or mine-laying, especially in the narrow waters of the Channel, where the larger ships lacked room to manoeuvre, and also to fly parachute or air landing troops over the sea to land at virtually any point inland in the British Isles. Control of the air was now necessary to maintain British command of the sea and great efforts were made at this time to build up an effective air defence. With the erosion of the traditional British reliance on the Royal Navy to defeat or deter invasion, there was also to come, though not until after the outbreak of war, a corresponding increase in the importance of anti-invasion and anti-raid planning and preparations on land to a scale never before known, for in the last resort it was on land that an invasion, or a seaborne or airborne raid, must be defeated if the Nation were to survive.

This study aims to concentrate upon a consideration of British planning and preparations to resist invasion and raids on land during the

Second World War. It does not underestimate the decisive influence of the Royal Navy or of the R.A.F.'s heroic stand in the Battle of Britain in deterring a potential invasion threat, but rather attempts to cover in some detail a major aspect that has hitherto been given very much a second place in most published works.

British planning and preparations to resist invasion on land can best be examined through an analysis of the periods of tenure of the various Commanders-in-Chief, Home Forces. Each of the successive Commanders-in-Chief, Home Forces, took up the post in very different circumstances and each adopted a very dissimilar approach to the problem. Their plans and dispositions had to be adapted according to the changing factors of the general war situation, of equipment, manpower, training, mobility and the strength and resources at the disposal of Home Forces; the type, degree and direction of the anticipated threat that existed at the time; and the thinking, not only of the Commander-in-Chief himself, but also that of the politicians and Service chiefs, as well as the attitude of mind of the country as a whole.

Yet, each Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, had similar problems to deal with. Common to all was the problem of where the Germans would land, in what strength and with what equipment. Was a raid or a full-scale invasion likely at any given point? Would the Germans be able to land tanks and transport, reinforcements and supplies? Would they stage a coup-de-main to seize a port, or land on open beaches, or descend from the sky? What would be their objectives? Were, indeed, the Germans likely to come at all? The Commander-in-Chief had to consider not only the threat, but also the plans and dispositions of Home Forces to meet it. Given the limited amount of manpower and equipment at his disposal, how best could his often meagre resources be disposed to deal promptly with the expected threat? Was it better to place divisions well forward in force as a 'crust' to cover the expected landing places, or to rely on a thin warning screen backed by mobile local reserves, or to trust in inland 'stoplines' to contain an enemy advance inland? Where were the mobile reserves, if there were any worth speaking of, to be placed - far forward near the danger points, or held back inland far from the coast so as to allow deployment against the greatest threat once it had been positively identified? Were the reserves sufficiently mobile and equipped to carry out their crucial task? How could the Commander-in-Chief cope with the loss of so much vital trained manpower, tanks, guns and equipment of all descriptions to overseas theatres, first to France and Norway, and later

to the Middle East, where they were as urgently needed as at home, and still render Britain secure against a possible invasion? What was he to do about the civil population in exposed coastal areas, about the security of a myriad of vulnerable points against sabotage or raids by fifth columnists or parachutists, about how to train, equip and employ the Home Guard, or about co-operation not only with the other Services, but also with the various civil authorities as well? How best could the lessons gained from bitter experience in the Norwegian campaign, in Holland, Belgium and France, and later from the fall of Greece and Crete, be incorporated into his plans and preparations? How could he balance the deployment of units for anti-invasion duties against the all-important necessity for sending them to the best training areas, often far away from the most threatened parts of the country, so they could improve their standard of training to a level which would allow them to cope better with the conditions of modern warfare? And how best could he maintain a state of readiness and alertness after the invasion threat had receded, but could rear its ugly head again at any time, if the course of the war were to turn dramatically once more in favour of the Axis powers?

All these factors had to be taken into account in the plans, preparations and dispositions of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, to resist invasion. It was on this one man that the greatest burden of the land defence of the British Isles lay, and it was an immense responsibility indeed, for not only the security of the nation, but that of the Free World, depended on its successful accomplishment. General Brooke, on taking over the post from General Ironside in the desperate days of July 1940, was to write:

"The idea of failure was enough to render the load of responsibility almost unbearable. Perhaps the hardest part of it all was the absolute necessity to submerge all one's innermost feelings and apprehensions, and maintain a confident exterior. To find oneself daily surrounded by one's countrymen, who may at any moment be entirely dependent for their security on one's ability to defend them, to come into contact with all the weaknesses of the defensive machinery at one's disposal, to be periodically racked with doubts as to the soundness of one's dispositions, and with it all to maintain a calm and confident exterior, is a test of character, the bitterness of which must be experienced to be believed." 2.

Finally, this study aims to consider briefly the hypothetical question of how effective the plans, preparations and dispositions of the

2. Bryant, Arthur: The Turn of the Tide 1939-1943, p. 195, Collins, London. 1957.

Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, would have been if the threat envisaged at the time had actually materialised, and how the Germans might have been expected to have attempted to overcome the various aspects of the land defence of the British Isles, and whether these could have stood the test of battle and served their purpose in repelling the invader.

PART I: THE KIRKE PERIOD: 3 September 1939 - 27 May 1940

CHAPTER 1: THE EARLY SCARES

In the years of international tension culminating in the Great War, the possibility of an invasion of the United Kingdom had loomed large in the minds of the military, the statesmen, planners and civilian experts, and, via the novelists and journalists, in the minds of the public. In 1900 the disasters of 'Black Week', the departure of large forces to South Africa, leaving only the Royal Navy effectively to protect our shores, and open hostility from the Continental Powers, led to a sense of insecurity at home and a realisation of Britain's vulnerability to an invasion from either France or Germany. The heightening tension between France and Germany over the Casablanca Incident and the prospect of possible British involvement in a war, combined with the Bosnian Crisis of 1908-09 and the 'Dreadnought' arms race with Germany, which threatened British supremacy at sea, served to add to British agitation about the likelihood of invasion, this time from Germany. Publicity for the need for home defence was further emphasised when, on March 17th, 1909, the War Office staged its first-ever mechanised anti-invasion exercise, in which a battalion of 1,000 Guardsmen, led by a Colonel in the best car at the head of the procession, were rushed 54 miles in 3½ hours in 286 motor cars, borrowed especially for the purpose through the Automobile Association, to repel an imaginary attack at Hastings. ¹.

The reality of war came in August 1914. The Army and the Fleet were mobilised, suspected spies were arrested, the home defence army was alerted, coast defences were activated and strategic points were placed under guard. Following the departure of the first five Regular Infantry Divisions of the British Expeditionary Force to France, the Committee of Imperial Defence proclaimed that the situation, with the Territorial and New Army Divisions still at a low level of efficiency, presented optimum conditions for a German raid to delay reinforcement of the B.E.F., or even an invasion on a grand scale. As a result, Kitchener temporarily held back the 6th and 7th Regular Divisions of the B.E.F. to guard against this possibility, while the Fleet took up its dispositions. The most vulnerable area of Britain was seen at first to be the East Coast, especially Harwich

1. Beckles, Gordon: Tanks Advance!, p.32, Cassell, London. 1942.

and the ports of Tyneside and Humberside, because of the danger of a possible German expedition from the North German ports, but, with the fall of Antwerp on October 10th and the threat to the Continental Channel ports, the threatened area was extended to include the Thames Estuary and Dover. East Anglia was felt to be particularly vulnerable, and here many trenches were dug, beaches were wired and troops were stationed as a precautionary measure. The Germans never intended to invade, since they were fully committed to fighting the war on the Continent and, in any case, were limited by lack of shipping, but the Kaiser's armies did occupy part of the Belgian coast, the German Navy was an ever present threat, and the newly discovered offensive power of the submarine in the North Sea posed a challenge to British supremacy at sea, so precautions had to be taken. On 2nd November, 1914, a German battle-cruiser squadron raided the Norfolk coast, and on 16th December, 1914, the German cruisers steamed out of the mist to shell Scarborough, Whitby and West Hartlepool on the North-East Coast, hitting harbours, barracks and killing many civilians in the towns. ². German Naval movements in November caused Kitchener to collect 300,000 troops, including some 9½ Territorial Divisions in England, although these still lacked training and had a weak command structure. These were spread along the coast to repel a possible landing. These incidents also further encouraged the installation of coastal batteries all along the East Coast, these mainly being sited to cover ports. Pillboxes too were built, especially around the Humber, and Thames and Medway estuaries. Some of these were of a rectangular design, but others were of a hexagonal pattern, a design feature to be repeated in 1940. In November, 1914, the Government, realising the necessity for making every provision to meet a possible invasion of England while the country was relatively demuded of troops, owing to the despatch of further reinforcements to the B.E.F., granted recognition to the voluntary formations that had grown up all over the country since August as unofficial, privately-backed, local guards for home defence, under the title of the Volunteer Training Corps. Made up primarily of those ineligible to serve in the Regular or Territorial Armies through age or disability, and later reorganised and formed into battalions and other units which were affiliated to local Regular garrisons, the Force "was to be called out for actual military service only in the event of imminent invasion, as notified by Royal Proclamation, although at other times voluntary offers of temporary service either by Corps or individuals

2. Liddell Hart, B. H.: History of the First World War, p. 74, Cassell, London. 1970.

could be accepted by G.O.C.'s." 3. By the Armistice of November 1918, the Volunteer Force was to total 254,826, all ranks, and over a million men had passed through it to the regular Army, having received valuable preliminary training. Finally disbanded in October 1920, the Volunteer Force was the direct forerunner of the Home Guard of the Second World War.

By January 1915, with the winter having set in, the German armies halted and locked in trench warfare, with plentiful troops of the New Armies and the Territorials stationed in Britain in their final stages of training, and with the German battle-cruiser squadron being defeated off the Dogger Bank on 24th January, the invasion threat was recognised as being remote. The question was considered again in the spring of 1915, but by then the home army was strong and the position of the coastal defences and the Royal Navy was much improved. The invasion controversy for the rest of the war was something of an anti-climax, again becoming primarily an inter-Service question and it engaged the attention of the supreme command only incidentally. Even so, the Government of the time took the threat of invasion seriously and, throughout the rest of the War, strong forces were retained in Britain for home defence. Indeed, in October 1918, for the first time ever, there was a scheme to use 48 tanks against possible German invaders in East Anglia and Kent, with an offensive counter-attacking role. 4.

However, with the ending of hostilities in 1918, Britain was beset by a natural revulsion against the horrors of "the War to end War" and, with the defeat of Germany and the resulting removal of the German Naval threat, an ostrich-like attitude to defence quickly developed, the ancient British fear of invasion dying away entirely. By 1920 the Great War defences had been rapidly dismantled. On the South and East coasts, the barbed wire was removed in the space of a few months and miles of trenches were filled in. One hundred thousand Territorials, designated for coastal defence were directed to other duties or disbanded. Coastal artillery was allowed to run down and as little money as possible was spent on the already outdated guns and equipment. The decline continued into the early

3. CAB 106/1188 Memoranda by Col. Golightly on the Origins of the L.D.V. and Home Guard. 1945.

4. WO 33/899 Scheme 'T' Emergency Arrangements for the Mobilisation of Tank Companies A2161. Oct. 1918.

1930's, and in 1932 a Ministerial Committee reported that, "the whole of the coast defences of the Empire at home and abroad are obsolete and out-ranged by the guns of a modern cruiser armed with six-inch ordnance." 5.

The rise of Nazi Germany during the 1930's, however, caused attention to be drawn once again to Britain's unpreparedness for war, but subsequent re-armament was focussed on countering the threat from the growing German Air Force, which, it was envisaged, might launch a direct attack on the country by means of an aerial bombardment in the form of a "knock-out blow" on London and other cities. Therefore, the emphasis was on the expansion of the R.A.F. and the means of air defence, leaving the Army to come low in the order of priority for re-armament.

Thus, the efforts of the planners in Britain in the late 1930's were concentrated against the possibility of a German bomber offensive from the air, and they virtually discounted the possibility of an enemy landing from the sea. Indeed, before the Second World War, no anti-invasion plans appear to have been made. If war came, it was assumed that it would be fought, like the last War, on the Continent and reliance was placed, therefore, on the Maginot Line in France. In February, 1937, the Chiefs of Staff Committee, then a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, believed that the advent of airpower meant that any preparations to invade would be unable to escape the watch of air reconnaissance patrols and that any expedition could be bombed and shelled to destruction before reaching these shores. In their Report of 15th February, 1937, it was stated that, "no danger of invasion would exist" and if a seaborne invasion on a large scale were attempted "we are confident that our naval and air forces would defeat it without the help of our land forces. The strength and dispositions of our home defence garrisons should, therefore, be decided without any consideration of danger from this scale of attack." They conceded that raids by troops carried in one or two unescorted ships on the East Coast were possible, but unlikely, and that, "our home defence should be prepared to deal with parties landed to demolish any important point which could not more easily be demolished by air bombardment. They should also be prepared to deal within reasonable time with raiding parties landed on more remote parts of the coast with the object of creating a diversion and holding troops in Great Britain. On all other parts of our coast, the maximum scale of landing which need be considered is the strength that could be put ashore from submarines." The Chiefs of

5. Collier, Basil: History of the Second World War: The Defence of the United Kingdom, pp. 4-5, 21, 49. H.M.S.O., London. 1957.

Staff Committee had also considered airborne land attack and reasoned that "if war occurred at the present time, the danger that the Germans would attempt an airborne land attack on any considerable scale would be negligible" since the Germans had not yet carried out extensive parachute troop training, but "small-scale raids landing demolition parties to destroy selected vulnerable points would be feasible and not improbable." It was concluded that the home forces' strength and dispositions "while designed to deal with sabotage parties landed from the air, need not, therefore, at present be determined with a view to meeting serious airborne land attack." 6.

Two years later, in February 1939, the planners still believed that the land forces to be retained in the United Kingdom need to be adequate only "to man the anti-aircraft defences and to maintain order and essential services in the event of major and sustained air attacks." 7. In March, 1939, the Germans occupied the remainder of Czechoslovakia, showing that they clearly had no intention of keeping to the Munich Agreement of the previous autumn. The British Government responded by joining the French in guarantees to Poland and at last began taking serious measures to rearm. These measures included bringing the 12 Territorial Divisions up to strength and then doubling them to 24 in March 1939, the introduction of conscription and the setting up of the Ministry of Supply to find weapons for the expanding Army. 8. In accordance with the assurances of the Chiefs of Staff, all the five Regular Divisions were to be sent to France, as soon as they were mobilised, if war broke out, to be followed by the Territorial Divisions as they became fit for service. 9. Not only was the Home Army to be reduced to a token force of semi-trained troops, but priority was also given to the Field Force in France for trained officers and the full output of equipment, artillery and transport from production. This meant that the troops of Home Forces would remain seriously short of equipment, even for training purposes. 10.

6. CID 248A, 15 Feb. 1937; and CAB 80/5 COS(39)125, 18 November 1939.

7. DP(P)44, Para. 253, 22 February 1939.

8. Collier, Basil: op. cit., p. 73.

9. DP(P) 56, 26 Apr. 1939.

10. Butler, J. R. M. (ed.): History of the Second World War: Grand Strategy, Vol. II: Sept. 1939 - June 1941, p. 29. H.M.S.O., London. 1957.

The Army at home also had to provide and man the fixed coastal artillery. They were backed by Territorial units which were available locally as mobile reserves, but in numbers enough only to oppose small sea or air-borne raids. ¹¹. The coastal defences themselves, for the same reason - the belief that anti-invasion preparations were unnecessary - had come a very low priority in defence measures. The Defence Requirements Committee had prepared a new series of schemes for the seaward defence of the major Naval bases and the most important ports and estuaries, as early as 1934, but financial limitations had mutilated their proposals, so that by autumn 1939, of the 28 ports listed that it was felt necessary to provide defences for, the most important 19 (Category 'A') had their defences planned in theory, but were still far below the approved requirements in armament; while at the other 9 Category 'C' ports, the defences were not to be installed until after the outbreak of war. Thus, when war was declared, the fixed defences were still very weak, with the 6 pdr. designed for close defence against light surface craft not yet being ready, while the 9.2" and 6" batteries still possessed old types of ammunition. ¹².

* * *

On the 3rd September 1939, following the German invasion of Poland, the United Kingdom found itself at war with Hitler's Germany. The British Expeditionary Force, consisting of four out of the five Regular Divisions, practically all the properly trained and equipped troops in the United Kingdom, sailed for France within a few weeks, leaving the country bereft of virtually any form of ground defence and leaving only weak forces under the command of General Kirke. Sir Auckland Geddes, Regional Commissioner for South-East England, commented, "Never was this Nation so unready, materially, mentally and morally. But fight we must until we have won." ¹³.

General Sir Walter Mervyn St. George Kirke was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, on 3rd September 1939, at the age of 62. A comparatively little-known figure to historians, he was an ex-gunner and had been a first-class sportsman in his younger days, having excelled at tennis, polo and golf. He had served throughout the Great War in Europe, and had also seen active campaigning in the Far East. He was a great

11. CID 1425A, 22 April 1938.

12. Collier, Basil: op. cit., p. 61.

13. BHLH Collection 1/311/116: Lord Geddes Papers: A Private Eve of the War Memo. 2 Sept. 1939.

friend of the Finns and a personal friend of Marshal Mannerheim, having, as Major General, headed a British Naval, Military and Air Force mission to Finland in the 1920's, during which he had advised the Finns on the construction of the Mannerheim Line across the Karelin Isthmus - a source of so much trouble to the invading Russians in the coming Winter War of 1939-40. He had held high commands in Britain since 1929, having been commander of the 5th Division and the Catterick Area from 1929 to 1931, General Officer C.-in-C., Western Command, until 1936, then Inspector-General of the Territorial Army until 1939, and finally Inspector-General of Home Defence since May 1939. He was, therefore, very well qualified to take the post of Commander-in-Chief, having had much experience with, and a good knowledge of, both Regular and Territorial Forces in the United Kingdom.

General Kirke was "very much a professional soldier" who put the needs of the Army first and "saw things very much from a soldier's point of view." He had a "friendly, outgoing and likeable personality". He generally got on well with his contemporaries and, unlike Ironside, he often saw eye to eye with Hore-Belisha, who tended to be "very much the arch-politician", always having an eye to his personal image. General Kirke was not an altogether conservative general, having, in the 1930's, produced the 'Kirke Report' on Army reform, which was suppressed because its suggestions were too radical. He was no desk general, preferring to spend most of his time out visiting troops rather than at G.H.Q.. In this task he always appeared to be "full of fire, energy and enthusiasm" and he "could chivvy people along", instantly saying so, if he thought things were wrong. Opinions vary as to whether he was a good public speaker, but it seems that, while he came across well to his subordinates, he did not put his arguments forward strongly enough to his superiors, a failing that was to have important implications in the sphere of home defence, when it came to arguing his case during the coming invasion scare. General Kirke was a "bon general ordinaire", a good all-round soldier and leader, but not an outstandingly brilliant commander. A much respected figure, he was held in high regard by his superiors and was thought by them to be the best man for the job as Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces. He was, on the face of it, a good choice. 14.

14. Interviews with Colonel Richard Kirke, son of Sir Walter, 27 July 1981; Lt.Col. J. Nigel St. G. Kirke, son of Sir Walter and formerly G.S.O. 3 (ops.) on his staff, 11 August 1981; and Lt.Gen. Sir William G. H. Pike, formerly G.S.O. 2 (ops.) on General Kirke's staff, 18 August 1981.

General Sir William Edmund 'Tiny' Ironside, recently returned from Gibraltar, and currently Inspector General of Overseas Forces, became, somewhat reluctantly, Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Ironside, who had been hankering after a fighting post and who had expected to become Commander-in-Chief of the B.E.F., was much more ill-suited and unhappy in his appointment. Ironside was cleverer than General Kirke, who used to refer jokingly to himself as "the stupid one", though General Kirke was a much cleverer man than Lord Gort, the newly appointed Commander-in-Chief of the B.E.F..¹⁵ Like General Kirke, Ironside was an ex-gunner and was, perhaps, slightly past his prime. Mr. Hore-Belisha, the Secretary of State for War, "recognised that both Kirke and Ironside were on the old side - but they still had drive, and he could see no others who had it."¹⁶

United Kingdom Home Forces had already been organised into five major Commands:- Western, Southern, Eastern, Northern and Scottish Commands. These were later given the status of Army headquarters and were, where appropriate, to have Corps headquarters under them. There was also Aldershot Command, which provided drafts and reserve formations, though this Command was abolished in February 1941, when it became an area in the newly formed South Eastern Command, and London Area, which became a separate District at the same time. In addition, there was Northern Ireland District, which was directly under the War Office and over which the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, had no control. Each Command was divided into Areas, Sub-Areas, Districts and Sub-Districts, but these were purely for administrative purposes and would not affect operational control of units.¹⁷

The Commands were all responsible to the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, this post replacing the previous one of Inspector-General of Home Defence, on the outbreak of war. General Kirke had a small staff and relatively limited powers, since, at the onset of war, invasion was not expected, and the main task for his Headquarters and those of the Commands was to absorb the recruits created by conscription, to train them and to provide units when required for despatch abroad. Because his General

15. Interviews with Col. Richard Kirke, 27 July 1981; Lt.Col. J. Nigel St. G. Kirke, 11 August 1981; and Lt.Gen. Sir William G. H. Pike, 18 August 1981.

16. Liddell Hart, Captain B. H.: Memoirs, Vol. II, p. 240. Cassell, London. 1965.

17. Army Lists, Oct. 1939.

Headquarters was not yet of vast importance, it was reduced to the status of a Headquarters, Home Forces, in December 1939. It was only in May 1940, when it appeared likely that the Commander-in-Chief would have to assume control of operations, that the Commander-in-Chief's Headquarters again became a General Headquarters, Home Forces. The Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, was then given operational control of all the military forces in the United Kingdom, except for Anti-Aircraft Command, which came under Fighter Command, R.A.F., though the War Office was still responsible for supervising the training of these troops and for administrative functions.

The G.H.Q. organisation was on conventional lines with, for example in June 1941, a Chief of General Staff in charge of Operations, Staff Duties and Training, and Intelligence branches; a Lieutenant-General of Administration in charge of the Adjutant-General, Quartermaster-General (Maintenance and Movements), Supplies and Transport, and Ordnance branches; a Chief Civil Staff Officer, who had duties in connection with the Home Defence Executive, of which the C.-in-C. was chairman; and specialist branches for the Royal Armoured Corps, Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers, Fortresses, Chemical Warfare, Signals, Aerodrome Defence and Camouflage. On policy and technical questions, the specialist branches dealt with the parallel War Office Directorates, but for operations they were solely responsible to the C.-in-C., Home Forces. 18.

The defence of the United Kingdom was an enormous combined operation in which the C.-in-C., Home Forces, with his responsibility for carrying out exercises and trials, as well as preparing and examining plans, needed to maintain the closest liaison both with the other Services and also with the Civil Authorities. Thus, the C.-in-C. had a Naval staff and an R.A.F. staff to provide liaison and information on their respective dispositions, while the Air branch, part of the Operations branch, provided advice on airborne questions. There were also Liaison Officers at Area Combined H.Q. around the country to enable the Army to co-ordinate its activities with the other Services on a local level. Liaison Officers from G.H.Q. also attended the Home Security War Room to collect information of military value to pass onto G.H.Q. and the Civil Staff Officer in the Cabinet War Room. Contact was also maintained with the Regional Commissioners both at G.H.Q. and at Command level. In May 1942, when a new expeditionary force was created with its own H.Q., these troops were still available

for Home Forces in the event of invasion and drew for their administrative services on the static units of the home command. Later still, in March 1943, planning for the invasion of Europe began and when H.Q. 21st Army Group was set up in June 1943, these forces remained available for U.K. defence, but otherwise were independent of G.H.Q., Home Forces, and dealt directly with the War Office. 19.

Something must be said briefly about the higher bodies that were to play an important part in influencing the policies and decisions of the Commanders-in-Chief, Home Forces. (See Appendix 1.) The C.-in-C., Home Forces, was responsible to the War Office, whose military head was the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. The C.I.G.S. regularly attended meetings of the Chief of Staff Committee, which had previously been a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence. However, on the outbreak of war, both the peace-time Cabinet and the C.I.D. were superseded by the War Cabinet, which was formed by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chamberlain. The War Cabinet met first on 3rd September 1939, and consisted of the Prime Minister and a small number of selected Ministers, including the three Service Ministers. Other Ministers, officials and experts were invited to attend meetings of the War Cabinet from time to time, while the Chiefs of Staff attended regularly for military business. The Chiefs of Staff Committee itself henceforward consisted of the C.I.G.S., General Sir W. Edmund Ironside (General Sir John Dill, from 27 May 1940); the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound; and the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Cyril Newall (Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, from 10 October 1940). Major General Hastings Ismay, hitherto Secretary of the C.I.D., was appointed Secretary to the C.O.S. Committee, later becoming a member on 2 May 1940, and also Deputy Secretary on the military side to the War Cabinet. The official function of the C.O.S. Committee was to hear reports and consider the situation, to decide on day to day problems concerning operations and to consider any matters specially referred to them by the War Cabinet, and they were, in fact, joint advisers to the Cabinet on military policy. The Committee's influence was to continue to grow steadily on all matters of military policy and in this they were greatly aided by virtue of their frequent meetings and efficient organisation.

19. *ibid.*

The Chiefs of Staff were backed up by the resources of their respective departments and the Committee was also served by two inter-Service bodies, the Joint Planning and the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee. As the War progressed, the increasing pressure on the time and energy of the already overburdened Chiefs of Staff prompted the Government to appoint, on 22 April 1940, three Vice Chiefs of Staff, who acted as subordinates for their Chiefs and whose meetings counted equally as meetings of the C.O.S. Committee. Thus, the Vice Chief of Staff Committee dealt with the more routine departmental work, leaving the C.O.S. Committee to deal with the urgent immediate matters and broad future policy.

On the formation of the National Coalition Government on 10 May 1940, Winston Churchill, the new Prime Minister, made a key change when he also became Minister of Defence with undefined powers, so as to supervise and direct the Chiefs of Staff by means of a Defence Committee. This provided a further link between the Chiefs of Staff and the War Cabinet, and meant that the C.O.S. Committee was now, for the first time, in direct daily contact with the executive head of the Government and in accord with him had full control over the conduct of the War and Armed Forces. The Defence Committee was divided into two parts, Operations and Supply, and, though its composition varied, it was always attended by the three Chiefs of Staff and by the Prime Minister in his new capacity as Minister of Defence. The Defence Committee replaced the Standing Ministerial Committee on Military Co-ordination, that had been set up in late October 1939 under the chairmanship of Lord Chatfield and which had included the Chiefs of Staff and the three Service Ministers, and whose function had been "to keep under constant review on behalf of the War Cabinet the main factors in the strategical situation and the progress of operations, and to make recommendations from time to time to the War Cabinet as to the general conduct of the war." All these bodies, and many others, were served by the single secretariat, with the result that duplication and misunderstanding were minimised and that the utmost flexibility in organisation was secured. ²⁰

The Chiefs of Staff, therefore, were entrusted with enormous power in a very wide variety of matters, one of the most important being in the formulation of policies for Home Defence and their decisions, together with those of the War Cabinet, consequently were to guide strongly and to influence the C.-in-C., Home Forces, in his planning and preparations to meet invasion.

20. Butler, J. R. M. (ed.): op. cit., pp. 247-249.

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General Kirke saw his main duty for the coming months as being, firstly, to complete the training of the formations earmarked for early departure overseas and, secondly, to convert the masses of men in uniform into soldiers as soon as possible. To achieve both these purposes, it was necessary to keep units and formations concentrated so that training could be carried out with the maximum speed and efficiency. ²¹. Any tasks that would require units to be dispersed, for example to aid the Civil Authorities in duties in connection with civil defence in the cities, to provide guards for vulnerable points, or to undertake an anti-invasion role, were to be most unwelcome to General Kirke.

From the time of his appointment as Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, General Kirke was handicapped by having only somewhat limited powers and he was to be continually frustrated in his primary tasks by the War Office. On the 7th September, General Kirke, following instructions from the C.I.G.S., closed his G.H.Q. at the Horse Guards and moved it to Kneller Hall, Twickenham. He did this:

".... with great reluctance, as I foresaw that the War Office would continue to try to command my troops, as in fact occurred. It was only as a result of constant struggling that my existence was recognised by my branch of the War Office. Attempts to obtain an adequate staff were met by Finance with every possible objection and obstruction."

This state of affairs was to continue throughout the winter:

"I was ordered to reduce my H.Q. from G.H.Q., Home Forces, to H.Q., Home Forces, and since there were no active operations overseas to occupy their attention, the War Office constantly interfered in my functions." ²².

General Kirke also had to fight to gain a larger responsibility on training matters from the Director of Military Training at the War Office, General Kirke's argument being, "that one cannot command troops in operations if one has no knowledge of their standard of efficiency." After long discussions, the C.I.G.S. at length gave him responsibility for the higher training of formations, with the D.M.T. placed at his disposal for this limited purpose. However:

21. Graves, C.: The Home Guard of Britain, p. 10. Hutchinson, London. 1943.

22. General Kirke Papers: Notes left by General Sir Walter Kirke, 1939-1940.

".... in practice the D.M.T. did everything possible to assert his complete independence. All divisions as they became at all ready for operations were entirely removed from my command, as were the training establishments. I was thus left with a certain number of divisions without equipment and much hampered by having to provide guards. In fact, I had access to only about half the troops commanded by my own G.O. C.-in-C.'s, and the latter were themselves debarred from visiting field army formations, which they had to maintain, and which they would command if active operations started in this country." 23.

From the outset of the War, the Government had been much obsessed with danger of sabotage, either from fifth columnists or from small parties of the enemy dropped by parachute, and it made constant demands for guards of every description. Guards had to be provided for R.A.F. establishments such as R.D.F. stations, fighter and bomber stations, balloon centres, maintenance units, fuel depots, non-operative H.Q.'s, training establishments and schools; for railway vulnerable points such as tunnels, bridges and viaducts; for waterworks, power stations, pumping stations and reservoirs; for Naval docks and harbours, embarkation ports, Naval wireless stations, Admiralty oil fuel installations, fixed defences, other ports, piers, Naval stores, etc., ammunition depots and forts; for military factories, stores, magazines, ordnance depots, etc., cable huts, transport fitting establishments, military W/T. and D.F. stations; and for B.B.C. stations, commercial oil installations, private factories, internment camps and P.O.W. camps. 24. The list of places to be protected seemed to be endless and was to grow at an alarming rate, consuming vast quantities of manpower that could be far more usefully employed elsewhere. General Kirke was to have a running battle to keep the numbers employed on this task down to within reasonable limits. Already by October:

"The provision of guards was a constant trouble. My view was that everything possible should be done to enable the Field Army to concentrate and train and that that should have priority over static guards. Government Departments all took a parochial view, particularly the R.A.F. (with the exception of Dowding).

The Adjutant General failed in his arrangements to get the Home Defence battalions up to establishment, and in fact changed his mind every few days as to whether they, or the labour in France, were the most important.

The Government would do nothing he asked, either to call up an older class or to enlist under-age lads for labour or guard duty. The P.U.S. [Permanent Under-Secretary of State for War] blocked expansion in every possible way.

23. General Kirke Papers: op. cit.

24. WO 166/1: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, G.H.Q. Home Forces, Feb. 1940: Appendix B: The Provision of Military Protection for Vulnerable Points, 7 Feb. 1940.

A Committee formed as the result of my constant agitation to reduce guards effected some temporary relief, but this was quickly swallowed up in guards for neutral shipping.

Throughout, there has been the curious situation that I, who had no responsibility for the B.E.F., was straining every nerve to get divisions trained at the expense of home defence, whereas the War Office has taken very little interest." 25.

General Kirke was now to be further frustrated in his desire to provide trained men and units for overseas by an invasion scare, which arose in late October 1939. Hitherto, the only Germans expected to land on British soil had been small parties landed by parachute to attempt to sabotage vulnerable points, but the October scare was to be on a far more serious level. The invasion scare was caused by a combination of Cabinet alarm over a series of somewhat suspect reports emanating from the Continent, and the dominating and persuasive personality of Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, who seized on them to expound his own worries about the security of the British homeland.

As early as 21 October 1939, Winston Churchill, worried by the reduction of British light Naval forces in the North Sea to provide escorts for trade protection, had raised the possibility of a German landing during the dark winter nights, at a meeting of the War Cabinet, and the Chiefs of Staff were invited to "consider whether there was any risk of a seaborne invasion or raid and, if so, what steps should be taken to meet it." 26. Churchill further outlined his worries in a letter to the First Sea Lord on the same day:

"I should be the last to raise those 'invasion scares', which I combatted so constantly during the early days of 1914-15. Still, it might be well for the Chiefs of Staff to consider what would happen if, for instance, 20,000 men were run across and landed, say, at Harwich, or at Webburn Hook, where there is deep water close inshore I do not think it is likely, but it is physically possible." 27.

He followed this up with a further letter to the First Sea Lord two days later, in which he said:

25. General Kirke Papers: op. cit.

26. CAB 65/1; WM 55th(39):2, 21 Oct. 1939.

27. Churchill, W. S.: Vol. I, The Gathering Storm, p. 462. Cassell, London. 1948.

".... it seems to me there ought to be a certain number of mobile columns or organised forces that could be thrown rapidly against any descent. Of course it may be that the air service will be able to assume full responsibility." 28.

The Chiefs of Staff merely requested the Joint Planning Committee to re-examine its Report of January 1937 on the prospects of invasion, in the light of the present situation. 29.

However, just a few days later, at 1.40 a.m. on Friday, 27 October, a telegram arrived from Sir Ronald H. Campbell in Belgrade which was to be seized on by Churchill to support his point of view and which was to have great implications for home defence. This telegram stated that the French Military Attaché in Yugoslavia had reported the receipt of information "which he received from [the] Head of Intelligence Branch of [the] Yugoslav General Staff who said he had obtained it from a reliable source in touch with officers of the German General Staff," to the effect that an enormous invasion was being planned by the Germans on Britain by land, sea and air, which would take place at any moment. The telegram said that the attack would be in the form of a landing by two divisions of parachutists (12,000 men) on the East Coast, backed up by a total of 80,000 troops transported over just two nights by small merchant vessels protected by motor torpedo boats, submarines and destroyers. The whole project would be covered by four German airfleets estimated in the telegram at no less than 5,200 aircraft, which would not only transport the parachutists, neutralise British aerodromes, aircraft factories and railways by bombing, but also neutralise the Royal Navy, protect the sea transports and cover their disembarkation on the East Coast! This vast number of aircraft, many more than the Germans in fact possessed, would have to carry out this long list of tasks over Britain from bases at least 200 miles away in North Germany, while the Germans were only known to have 4,000 trained parachutists! While these operations were in progress, a diversion, according to the telegram, would be made in France by an attack on the Maginot Line "under the cover of 280 mm. and 300.5 mm. guns, 60 ton tanks, new types of flame throwers and 800 kg. armour-piercing aerial torpedoes launched from aircraft"! 30.

28. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., pp. 666-667.

29. CAB 79/1, COS 56th(39):4, 23 Oct. 1939; and CAB 80/4, COS(39) 93, 21 Oct. 1939.

30. CAB 83/1, 19/10/163: 5th Meeting of the M.C. Committee, 27 Oct. 1939, Annex: Telegram No. 305 from Yugoslavia.

The whole thing sounded somewhat improbable and Sir Ronald Campbell assessed it as such:

"I have telegraphed it because it seems possible that the German Government, realising their inability to conduct a long war, may stake everything on a wild venture." ³¹.

General Kirke was not impressed by this report, which he felt was "obviously put about by the enemy":

"Hore-Belisha asked me to dinner to discuss the question prior to a co-ordination meeting, and I told him what had happened in the last war was as a result of similar enemy propaganda. Troops were being kept away from France in '17 and '18 which nearly lost us the war." ³².

Although the General Staff "did not attach much credence" to the telegram, ³³. Winston Churchill "raised a great scare in the Cabinet" ³⁴. and at 9.30 p.m. the same day, the Military Co-ordination Committee, chaired by Lord Chatfield, the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence, and consisting of the Service Ministers and their military advisers, met at Churchill's request to consider the telegram.

Winston Churchill opened with his customary verve by delivering "an impassioned address, the tenor of which was that troops should be kept back from France to meet this imminent danger." ³⁵. Churchill "felt that the Fleet could not get advance information of the project and that the invasion would be upon us before we knew where we were, and he felt that the Navy could not stave it off." ³⁶. He drew a comparison between the present day and the situation in 1914 and pointed out that:

31. CAB 83/1, 19/10/163: 5th Meeting of the M.C. Committee, 27 Oct. 1939, Annex: Telegram No. 305 from Yugoslavia.

32. General Kirke Papers: op. cit.

33. Minney, R. J.: The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha, p. 253. Collins, London. 1960.

34. General Kirke Papers: op. cit.

35. *ibid.*

36. Minney, R. J.: op. cit., p. 253.

".... early in the last war, at a time when we possessed a great Fleet at Scapa Flow, and had strong forces of cruisers and destroyers at various points on the East Coast, we had still been nervous of the possibility of invasion, and had taken considerable precautions against it. At the present time, the Naval situation was in no way comparable to that. The East Coast was bare. Many of our great ships were away hunting the 'Admiral Scheer' and the 'Deutschland', while the majority of our destroyers were engaged on hunting U-boats and on convoy work.

If the Germans decided to undertake a desperate venture of the kind suggested in the Telegram, they might embark the expedition in a large number of merchant ships which could be escorted by 25 to 30 good destroyers, and they might reckon on bursting their way into a port, say, Harwich or the Humber. They might count on the way being prepared for them by the operations of their parachute troops."

Churchill concluded by arguing that:

"The Germans were faced with the necessity of undertaking some great operation either against ourselves or against the French. They might shrink from sacrificing vast numbers in an attack on the Maginot Line, whereas they might well gamble on a hazardous venture against Great Britain, which, if it succeeded, would cause us great loss and confusion, and if it failed, would only entail the loss of 80,000 men. He thought, therefore, that we should treat the possibility seriously and take due precautions." 37.

A consideration of the Chiefs of Staff's memoranda of 1937 followed in which the technical possibilities of a seaborne land attack had been fully investigated. In this it had been thought that the enemy might embark a force of one division (say 17,000 men) in 20 ships of 4,000 or 5,000 tons. At 15 knots such a force would require 20 hours to reach the nearest point on the East Coast of Great Britain, i.e. East Anglia, and, since it had to make part of its voyage in daylight, it should be detected if reconnaissance was maintained. 38.

The meeting then went on to consider what action might be taken to meet the risk of invasion. Both Sir Dudley Pound for the Navy, and Sir Cyril Newall for the Air Force, sounded equally uncomfortable and pessimistic. Pound proposed a submarine screen across the route from Germany to Great Britain and the reinforcement of light Naval forces on the East Coast, but said that Naval reconnaissance would not be so easy to arrange as in the last war and was reluctant to move heavy ships into the North Sea because of their vulnerability to air attack. Newall proposed frequent

37. CAB 83/1, 19/10/163: 5th Meeting of the M.C. Committee, 27 Oct. 1939.

38. *ibid*; and CID Paper No. 248-A, 15 Feb. 1937.

reconnaissance over the German ports and North Sea to try and gain information of any preparations and said that the Bomber and Fighter Commands would be alerted, but admitted the danger of a large paratrooper landing, following a preliminary air attack "on the largest scale". This, he said, would be facilitated if the Germans seized Holland, so they "would then be able to support the operations of their bombers over this country with their short-range as well as their long-range fighters. It was only on some such assumption that the figure of 5,200 aircraft could be made up." 39.

It was therefore assumed that the Army would have to deal with a formidable foe. General Kirke, representing the Army at the meeting, was next asked for his views. He recalled:

"Pound, to my great regret, would not promise any Naval interference, as the Fleet was withdrawn from Scapa, and Newall was equally defeatist. When asked, I said that:

- a) It was most unlikely that the enemy would carry out operations until the air factor was more favourable, i.e. until his fighters could support his bombers.
- b) Therefore he must first take Holland and possibly Belgium, and that the [German] Naval preparations were much more likely to be for that purpose.
- c) That the best safeguard was to prevent him getting Holland or Belgium by pressing on with the B.E.F., and not by diverting its energies to Home Defence at the expense of training.
- d) Better provision for guarding V.P.'s should be made or the number reduced, so as to free the Field Army for training.
- e) The Field Army should be made mobile.

Mr. Churchill, however, took charge of the meeting over Lord Chatfield's head, and was most insistent.

It was obvious that I should have to do something to calm him or the Cabinet down, and I therefore suggested:

- a) Moving the Armoured Division to East Anglia.
- b) Hiring transport to make the Field Army mobile.

The former would do no harm, as the Division was going to move somewhere anyway, and the latter was a great gain for normal training." 40.

39. CAB 83/1, 19/10/163: 5th Meeting of the M.C. Committee, 27 Oct. 1939.

40. General Kirke Papers: op. cit.

Mr. Hore-Belisha, who, unlike Churchill, held General Kirke's opinions in high regard, tried to back General Kirke's arguments by attempting to pour cold water on the rumours. He emphasised the unreliability of the source and drew attention to the possibilities that "the report might have been deliberately put out by the Germans to confuse us" or that "it might be a 'red herring', designed to draw us off the track of a real operation being planned elsewhere. This was a technique favoured by the Germans, as we had experienced in the past. It was on the cards that the activity in North-West Germany might presage an attack, not on Great Britain, but on Holland." 41.

However, neither General Kirke nor Hore-Belisha succeeded in dissuading the Cabinet from succumbing to Churchill's powerful argument. Hore-Belisha wrote to Lord Gort a few days later that "we tried to riddle the arguments, but nevertheless we were instructed to prepare plans for meeting the invasion and even for bringing back divisions, if necessary, from France." 42.

As a result of the meeting, General Kirke was called upon "to prepare immediate plans to meet an invasion on a large scale, based on a source of enemy action which had previously been ruled out as unlikely". These plans, to be produced on the spur of the moment, were to emerge as the 'Julius Caesar' plan within the next few days. 43.

General Kirke tended to see things very much from the point of view of a professional soldier, who kept the needs of the military uppermost in his mind. He reluctantly accepted the necessity to deploy forces for home defence. He was not the man to raise a great fuss about the situation, but was content to get on with his job, even if privately he did not totally agree with everything he was instructed to do. To General Kirke, home defence was "a job to be done". 44. His purely military attitude contrasted with the attitude of Churchill, who took a much wider view of the invasion threat and had foremost in his mind the morale of the country as a whole, not merely the requirements of military strategy.

41. CAB 83/1, 19/10/163: 5th Meeting of the M.C. Committee, 27 Oct. 1939.

42. Minney, R. J.: op. cit., p. 253.

43. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 7: The Julius Caesar Plan, 15 November 1939.

44. Interview with Colonel Richard Kirke, 27 July 1981.

Churchill was also very much the amateur strategist. General Kirke recollected that after the meeting:

"Mr. Churchill came up and expressed regret if he had upset my show, and I ventured to remind him of the German propaganda put out through neutral military attachés in 1918, which had kept Pétain's General Reserve towards Switzerland, when it ought to have been moving to help us."

General Kirke, like succeeding Commanders-in-Chief, Home Forces, had a very low opinion of Churchill's military ideas. Deploying forces for home defence contradicted what he saw as the correct military strategy - that all the efforts of Home Forces should be devoted to training troops and despatching formations to France, so that the war could be fought on the Continent. To Kirke, Churchill's strategy:

".... seemed to me to be designed to prevent our sending troops overseas to help our Allies or friends, and I have no doubt it was in preparation for his Scandinavian adventures, and generally to retain the morale initiative by worrying our amateur strategists. I believe at a Cabinet meeting to consider the recommendations of the Co-ordination Committee, Mr. Chamberlain took rather my view." 45.

The following day, 28th October, Lord Chatfield, reported to the War Cabinet that the telegram had been considered by the Military Co-ordination Committee and, although they thought the plan somewhat fantastic, they admitted the possibility existed, especially in view of the fact that the development of aerial warfare had changed the position in the North Sea. He outlined the Committee's conclusions as to the practicalities of such an operation, which were very similar to Churchill's analysis, that the most likely proceeding would be a heavy and sustained air offensive against the British Fleet and R.A.F., followed by a parachute landing to seize a port to enable the comparatively easy disembarkation of a seaborne expedition. It was not thought likely that the Germans would land on an open beach, because of the unpredictable weather conditions at this time of year. The Germans were expected to rely on surprise for their success and to make full use of the lengthening nights.

The three Service Ministers then went on to outline the precautionary measures to be taken by their respective Services, that were approved by the Military Co-ordination Committee meeting. The Secretary of State for War, Hore-Belisha, after briefly outlining the Army's preparations, took

45. General Kirke Papers: op. cit.

the opportunity to emphasise again the improbability of an enemy expedition, pointing out how complicated and hazardous an opposed landing would be and that the German troops could be landed with very little in the way of transport, food, reserves of ammunition, or artillery. He also again drew attention to the fact that alarmist reports like this were very likely put out by Germany to conceal their real intentions, for example, a possible seaborne attack on the Netherlands. The Minister for Home Security, Sir John Anderson, added that the police might be able to play some role if they were armed, and undertook to confer with General Kirke immediately on this subject. The War Cabinet approved the action taken, or about to be taken, and also invited the Secretary of State for Air, Sir Kingsley Wood, to furnish the War Cabinet each morning with the weather forecast for the next 24 hours. 46.

The next day saw discussions at the War Cabinet meeting continued to include the danger of parachute landings in places such as aerodromes and the London Parks, and Churchill urged a review of the dispositions of troops in London, so as to safeguard vulnerable objectives like the Government offices. 47.

Tension began to mount on 30th October, when the Secretary of State for War reported that the projected invasion of Great Britain was being well advertised in a number of reports arriving from the Continent, though Hore-Belisha himself felt that the receipt of so many reports "therefore tended to discredit the possibility of invasion". However, Government offices in Berlin were said to have moved to their war stations, which "might be consistent with some intention, which would be likely to invite retaliation". The Chief of the Imperial General Staff added, to the effect that, the German intention could well be an invasion of the Netherlands, not Great Britain, since "as far as could be ascertained, the report of an alleged assembly of flat-bottomed boats, which might be used for an attack on Holland, was true. From the military point of view, such an attack would be perfectly feasible." Hore-Belisha said that all troops had been issued with full-scale war ammunition and that plans had been made to enable the 48th and 51st Divisions to be moved rapidly to the East Coast, if necessary, while the 1st Armoured Division was also prepared to move at short notice. 48.

46. CAB 65/1 and CAB 65/3: WM 63rd(39):5, 28 Oct. 1939.

47. CAB 65/1 and CAB 65/3: WM 64th(39):4, 29 Oct. 1939.

48. CAB 65/3: WM 65th(39):3, 30 Oct. 1939.

That night a signal reached the War Office suggesting that a German raiding force was on its way to East Anglia. As a result, and without waiting to call a meeting of the Army Council, which the Secretary of State for War attended, the C.I.G.S., General Ironside, considering the matter to be urgent, had warned General Kirke and ordered the 51st Division in reserve at Aldershot to move to East Anglia. The raid was a false alarm, but his action led to a disagreement the next day with Hore-Belisha, who claimed that the C.I.G.S. was not authorised to send orders to the Commander-in-Chief and that this was the prerogative of the Army Council. This dispute over who should give orders to whom should have been resolved by the Committee of Imperial Defence before the War, for it was to lead to further friction between Ironside and the sometimes rather high-handed Hore-Belisha in the coming months. 49.

The 31st October saw further discussions about the invasion scare at the meeting of the War Cabinet. Again, the Secretary of State for War tried to belittle the reports, stating that although "rumours of an impending German attack on Great Britain, either by sea or air, were now being received from sources as widely diverse as The Hague and Peking", there now "seemed little doubt those rumours were being spread by Germany. The moral was that we should not allow ourselves to be deflected from our main strategy." 50.

By the 31st October, too, the War Cabinet was beginning to recover from its alarm over the imminence of invasion and it even considered some modification of the action agreed on over the last few days. The Minister without Portfolio, Lord Hankey, said he had not been greatly disturbed by the original report which had on the 27th October led to an urgent review of our home defence requirements, but that he "was not at all sure that these arrangements as a whole had received sufficient consideration", especially since the review "had disclosed the weakness of our Naval forces operating off the East Coast, and the absence of mobile artillery with the land forces in the East of England." He pointed out that "nothing would do more to upset our programme for the despatch of forces overseas, than an attempted raid, even though this might prove unsuccessful. However, provided our home defence organisation was on a sound basis, there was no reason

49. Macleod, R. and Kelly, D. (eds.): The Ironside Diaries 1937-1940, pp. 160-161. Constable, London. 1962

50. CAB 65/1: WM 66th(39):5, 31 Oct. 1939.

why we should be alarmed by these sudden reports." The War Cabinet expressed general agreement with this view and "the suggestion that it might be possible to take adequate steps to deal with the threat of a seaborne raid at a smaller cost in requisitioned transport, with less disturbance to civil industry, was cordially welcomed." It was recalled that "the Germans had never yet carried out a combined operation involving land and sea forces working in conjunction except at Libau, when their arrangements had broken down badly. Such an operation was an extremely complicated matter, requiring great experience and very careful preparation." However, it would "not be safe to assume that the negative results of air reconnaissance over North-West Germany necessarily showed that the danger of an expedition had passed altogether." The Cabinet concluded that it would not therefore be wise to cancel on this account all the arrangements agreed upon on the 27th October and they asked the War Office to report their plans for dealing with invasion to the War Cabinet as soon as possible. 51.

Throughout the invasion scare, Hore-Belisha had constantly and quite rightly tried to play down the alarmist reports from the Continent. He, like General Kirke who shared his views, was strongly opposed to any Divisions of the B.E.F. being brought back from France and both felt that the rumours were no more than a German ruse to disrupt our plans and to discourage the B.E.F.. That night, Hore-Belisha wrote to Lord Gort, Commander-in-Chief of the B.E.F., about the reinforcement programme:

"We have nearly had all our plans jiggered up by the reports of an intended 'invasion'." Winston took it very seriously."

And on the next day, 1st November, he followed this up:

".... the same rumour came from various other 'reliable sources' and I pleaded throughout that our main strategy should not be deflected.... I hope that my colleagues will all agree that we need not do anything which would upset our training or programme." 52.

What was the true origin of this series of alarmist reports that caused so much apprehension amongst the War Cabinet and the Service Chiefs, and which nearly caused a major change in British strategy? There is now

51. CAB 65/1 and CAB 65/3: WM 66th(39):5, 31 Oct. 1939.

52. Mirney, R. J.: op. cit., pp. 252-253.

little doubt that the rumours were being put about by German agents, so as to reach the ears of the intelligence networks of sympathetic neutral countries who would inform the British or Allied military attaches present there, who would in turn commute the reports to the United Kingdom. The German aim was doubtless to do just what General Kirke and Hore-Belisha feared most, to throw the reinforcement programme for the B.E.F. out of gear by spreading alarm and despondency in Britain, which would lead to valuable troops being deployed in Britain for home defence which might otherwise be sent to France. The War Cabinet fully realised this probability at the time, but could never be absolutely certain of Germany's true intentions. The necessary counter-measures, therefore, had to be taken.

CHAPTER 2: THE 'JULIUS CAESAR' PLAN

All the invasion rumours were quickly found to be false, but they had led to a sudden awareness that there was some possibility of at least a raid and that precautions must be improved. Although there were no less than 280,000 men under arms in Great Britain, not including training establishments, the Army's dispositions at the end of October were geared to two tasks other than their primary function of training troops and formations for overseas. These were, firstly, to assist the civil population in a variety of ways in case of heavy air attack and, secondly, to deal with sabotage raids by parachutists. There had been up to this time no plans made to counter an invasion, because none was expected. General Kirke's initial preparations to resist a possible enemy landing, therefore, had to be improvised on the spur of the moment and were at first an adaptation of the existing dispositions of formations in the country. (See Map 1.)

General Kirke's problem was to make adequate provision against invasion without interfering unduly with training for overseas. There were six Territorial Divisions in England north of the Thames, within easy reach of the East Coast. On 27th October, General Kirke had reported to the Military Co-ordination Committee that:

".... each of these had a mobile column organised, consisting of one or more battalions, which would be transported in hired buses, which were standing by apart from the mobile columns, the Army at home was much handicapped by lack of equipment, particularly as such equipment as the Army possessed was spread round for the purpose of training. If, therefore, it was desired to form a Force to withstand invasion, equipment would have to be concentrated in the hands of the units of that Force, to the detriment of the training of the whole." ¹.

Additionally, there were another two Territorial Divisions near the coast south of the Thames, a further three Territorial Divisions in Scotland, and the 5th Regular and the 1st Cavalry Division training in Yorkshire, while 40,000 National Defence Company or Territorial Army personnel were tied up in protecting vulnerable points, including aerodromes which each had a guard of not less than two platoons (about 60 men).

1. CAB 83/1, 19/10/163: 5th Meeting of the M.C. Committee, 27 Oct. 1939.

Most of the Territorial Divisions were in a comparatively early stage of training, especially the twelve 'duplicate' Territorial Divisions that had been created virtually overnight shortly before the outbreak of War from cadres supplied by each of the original twelve Territorial Divisions. In the case of each pair of divisions, both of which had strong local connections and were based on a similar recruiting area, from which they both took their names, the original division was the better trained and equipped whereas its duplicate, lacking all but the barest minimum of equipment required for training and virtually consisting only of semi-trained rifle-men, had "literally come straight off the streets". 2.

General Kirke had, however, the 48th (S. Midland) and 51st (Highland) Territorial Divisions at Salisbury and Aldershot, respectively, which were getting ready to go to France and which were in the most advanced state of training. He also had the 1st (Regular) Armoured Division at Salisbury, which could move to East Anglia if necessary. From what he heard at the meeting on 27th October, he thought "that sufficient notice of a landing would be obtained to allow of units from Aldershot and Salisbury reinforcing the mobile columns on the East Coast within six hours of a landing" and had assured the Military Co-ordination Committee that "as the enemy would be without transport, artillery and supplies, he was confident that he would be able to deal with them with the forces available". He had, therefore, recommended that "the Army should carry out the necessary reconnaissances and formulate the necessary plans, so that units from Aldershot and Salisbury could move at very short notice to reinforce the mobile columns on the East Coast", while "the mobile columns would be directed to prepare specifically for the task of meeting such an invasion". He also proposed to reinforce the garrison at the defended ports of Harwich and the Humber, at which 9.2" and 6" guns were emplaced, with mobile artillery. 3.

However, the lack of efficiency of these initial preparations was illustrated by the fact that the 48th and 51st Divisions, the two Territorial Divisions most ready to take the field, would still have had to requisition their transport in order to be able to move to the coast. At the War Cabinet meeting on 31st October, Hore-Belisha, reluctant as ever to see formations deployed for anti-invasion duties that should be training in preparation to be shipped overseas, drew attention to "the great expense

2. Interview with Lt.Col. J. Nigel St. G. Kirke, son of Sir Walter and formerly G.S.O. 3 (ops.) on his staff, 11 August 1981.

3. CAB 83/1, 19/10/163: 5th Meeting of the M.C. Committee, 27 Oct. 1939.

and inconvenience to the civil population which could be caused if steps were now taken to requisition the motor transport required to place the two divisions on a mobile basis. Investigation had shown that measures on the proposed scale were altogether unnecessary in present circumstances." The War Cabinet were informed that "there were in this country many times more troops than were necessary to meet the contingency of a possible raid from Germany" and that "a more detailed examination of the problem would almost certainly show that full security would be given against this threat at a much smaller cost". The War Cabinet therefore decided that "the motor transport needed to place two divisions on a mobile basis should not for the present be requisitioned". 4.

General Kirke took advantage of the invasion scare to secure much needed transport, which could be used not merely for anti-invasion purposes but for the far more serious job, as he saw it, of training the troops. As a result of the meetings held during the invasion scare, General Kirke was to recollect that:

"Apart from the transport, I got a few other things through, which the War Office had been holding up, but it was only a week or so before the pendulum swung back again and I was heavily pressed to discharge all the transport. This I declined to do unless, or until, the Cabinet modified the scale of attack. But, as considerable sums of money were being wasted in retaining transport to meet a sea invasion, which I did not consider a feasible operation until the Dutch coastline was in enemy hands, I cut down transport which could not be used for training purposes."

Over the next few months:

"Pressure to reduce transport continued as the hiring bill was a large one, but I carried on on the principle that anything that helped training was worth while, but that anti-invasion transport was a waste of public money and should be discharged." 5.

Besides the problems connected with repelling a seaborne invasion, the War Cabinet was still worried about the possibility of airborne raids and it discussed this problem on the 31st October. The Germans were known to possess 4,000 parachutists. The existence of German airborne forces had added a fresh dimension to the defence of Britain. If these forces were

4. CAB 65/1 and CAB 65/3: WM 66th(39):5, 31 Oct. 1939.

5. General Kirke Papers: Notes left by General Sir Walter Kirke, 1939-1940.

used in conjunction with a heavy and sustained air attack on Great Britain, they might be able to cause serious damage to vital munition industries. The War Cabinet was worried that:

"Such damage might slow up the production of the equipment for the new divisions, and might delay their ultimate readiness for war far more than the interruption to the training of these formations which would result from their re-disposition to meet the threat of a raid. There were also certain areas of Britain in which the numbers of troops available to deal with such a threat were very small."

On the other hand, it was argued that the technical difficulties of landing parachutists were very great and "in any case the danger was a purely local one, and, provided there were small mobile forces available within reasonable distance, these, in conjunction with the guards on aerodromes and other vital points, would probably be sufficient." The Commander-in-Chief, it was reported, was examining the problem in detail and the War Cabinet concluded reassuringly that "there seemed to be no reason to believe that its solution would present any great difficulty." 6.

The War Cabinet, at its meeting on 31st October, had also invited the War Office "... to report to the War Cabinet as early as possible their plan for insuring the necessary degree of mobility of troops stationed in this country, without undue disturbance to the training of the Army or to civil industry." 7. Consequently, at the War Cabinet meeting on 8th November, a Memoranda by the Secretary of State for War, covering a paper by General Kirke on his proposed plans, was duly circulated, while the C.I.G.S., General Ironside, explained the defence arrangements to the assembled War Cabinet with the aid of a map. 8.

General Kirke had been called upon to prepare immediate plans to meet invasion on a large scale as early as 27th October. The following day he directed the Commands to commence preparing plans and, on the 30th October, General Kirke held a conference of the G.O. C.-in-C.'s at the Horse Guards to hammer out the details of the general plan. General Kirke believed strongly that the planning and preparations to resist invasion must not in any circumstances be allowed to interfere unduly

6. CAB 65/1 and CAB 65/3: WM 66th(39):5, 31 Oct. 1939.

7. ibid.

8. CAB 65/1: WM 75th(39):9, 8 Nov. 1939. CAB 66/3: WP(39):113, 4 Nov. 1939.

with the main strategy. At the conference he emphasised that in making these proposals, he "was naturally anxious to avoid taking any steps which would in any way interfere with the existing plan for methodical preparation of troops for employment overseas" and considered that this condition could be met by "increasing the state of preparedness of the various troops already located on the East Coast and by studying beforehand the moves which might be required to reinforce these troops by the divisions elsewhere which were in a higher state of readiness, owing to their preparation for service overseas." Furthermore, "it would be all to the good to accelerate the provision of equipment to these divisions there was to be no intention of interfering with their training unless and until the actual emergency should arise." ⁹.

The details of the plan were worked out over the next few days and, in the meantime, some important redispositions of formations were made. On the 5th and 6th November, the 1st Armoured Division, in G.H.Q. Reserve, was moved from Salisbury Plain to the area of Newmarket - Saffron Walden - Bishops Stortford - Luton - Shefford, within Eastern Command, so as to be within easy reach of the area felt to be most vulnerable, the East Anglian coast, while on the 6th November, the 1st Light Armoured Brigade, the core of which was shortly to become the 2nd Armoured Division, was moved from Southern Command to the Yorkshire-Lincolnshire border area near Selby and placed under Northern Command. (See Map 1.) The 1st Armoured Division, consisting of the 2nd Light Armoured Brigade and the Heavy Armoured Brigade, was inspected immediately on its arrival by General Kirke's G.S.O. 1, Colonel W. Carden-Roe. General Kirke, who was most worried about its poor state of training, noted that:

"The general feeling seemed to be that in many ways the move has been a good thing; one Tank Battalion, for instance, has been inside barracks for six years. At the same time, the new area is most unsuitable for collective training and reconnaissances have produced no suitable ground, except small patches near Newmarket. It is hoped, therefore, that some arrangement will be made to relieve by Christmas time, otherwise the Division will never be fit to proceed overseas." ¹⁰.

9. WO 166/1: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, G.H.Q. Home Forces, October 1939. Appendix E: Minutes of C.-in-C.'s Conference, 30 Oct. 1939.

10. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 3: Notes on Visit to 1st Armoured Division, 7 Nov. 1939.

By mid November, General Kirke's first hastily produced plans had been modified and clarified, and were now essentially complete, though he fully realised that details would have to be constantly amended to meet changing circumstances and varying resources. On the 15th November the plan for home defence was issued to all Commands, the War Office and the Air Ministry. ^{11.}

General Kirke's plan to resist invasion was, rather inappropriately since it took its name from the commander of one of the most successful invasions of this country, code-named 'Julius Caesar'. The codeword 'Julius' signified that there were indications that an invasion was contemplated and was to bring the home defence forces to a state of readiness at eight hours' notice, while the codeword 'Caesar' meant that invasion was imminent, that all transport would be collected, ammunition would be distributed and all units would be warned for immediate action. ^{12.}

The 'Julius Caesar' Plan, or the 'J.C. Plan', as it was always referred to by General Kirke's staff, mainly for reasons of security, was based on the assumption that the maximum possible scale of attack would be a landing by 4,000 trained parachutists, followed by a maximum of 15,000 troops carried in 1,000 civil aircraft. Although the civil aircraft were capable of carrying 15 men each, Germany was only known to possess 6,000 airlanding troops, trained as such. The maximum seaborne force was estimated at one or more divisions of 15,000 fully equipped troops, each carried in twenty 4,000-5,000 ton transports, escorted by 25 to 30 modern destroyers. Any attempt at a major landing would probably be accompanied by a heavy air offensive against the Fleet, R.A.F. and "other objectives in the country". This would be carried out by 1,750 long-range bombers operating from Germany, but could be made easier if Dutch aerodromes were captured, since then both dive-bombers and short-range fighters could be employed.

The possible form of the enemy plan was expected to be for the parachutists to drop and seize an aerodrome or aerodromes, so permitting the landing of troop-carrying civil aircraft. Part of this force would then proceed to capture a port from the vulnerable landward side, so as to allow the disembarkation of the divisions arriving by sea. A beach

11. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939.

12. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 7: The 'Julius Caesar' Plan, 15 Nov. 1939.

landing in force was thought impossible during winter weather conditions.

The most likely objective was felt to be an aerodrome or landing ground near a port of considerable size, Harwich or the Humber being regarded as the most suitable places. A large port was necessary, because the disembarkation of a field force would be "a very slow and formidable undertaking, even if entirely unopposed, and the rate at which it can be carried out depends largely on the number of ships which can be handled simultaneously, and consequently on the number of quays, wharves and cranes available". For example, it would take several days to land a division at Harwich, complete with transport. Other ports that might possibly be seized as landing places included Aberdeen, Dundee, Yarmouth, Lowestoft and Ramsgate, and defence precautions were therefore to be taken at all ports between Peterhead and Newhaven, where ships could come alongside, to protect against a coup de main.

The early capture of a port would also be necessary, since "it is axiomatic that men landed from the air can bring little with them but rifles, light machine guns and a limited amount of ammunition. They would therefore have little staying power, nor power of manoeuvre, unless quickly supported and maintained from the sea." If the capture of a port were carried out by troops landed from the air, they would have to be dropped in an unenclosed area, otherwise they could not collect again quickly, which would mean some delay in actually getting control of the port. Added to this, would be the time necessary to drive the defence from all ground covering the docks, anchorage or entrance to the port before the transports could enter to unload. Not only this, but once the landing from the air had begun, the point of attack would have been disclosed and could not again be changed. The whole issue, therefore, depended on the early capture of a port for German success.

General Kirke believed that the answer lay in the rapid defeat of the airborne force, so that the seaborne force would be deprived of its support and its landing facilities, and would fail. He saw that it would be "supremely dangerous to attempt seaborne operations until the success of the airlanding operations have been confirmed, so, if the initial airlanding operations are a failure, the operation cannot proceed and had definitely failed." 13.

13. *ibid.*

General Kirke envisaged the general plan of operations on land as depending upon the ability of local forces to pin down the German airborne troops so as to give time for the mobile reserves to reach the area of operations. Troops in the area attacked were to inflict the maximum amount of casualties as the enemy were actually landing and collecting from their parachutes or transport aircraft. These troops were to be assisted by A.D.G.B. and any R.A.F. personnel on the spot and there was to be no falling back in the face of superior numbers, except under orders. Quick action was largely dependent on early warning of airborne descent to the formations concerned by Observer Corps units of the R.A.F. and A.D.G.B., which completely covered the East Coast area, and by the Civil Authorities, with whom the military were in close touch. Then, if any landing in force were actually effected, a cordon would be drawn round the area by troops in the vicinity, using either the first-line transport now being provided or all means of mobility capable of improvisation, "the object being to immobilise the invader until further troops could be brought up to finish him off". 14.

If the landing occurred in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire or East Anglia, the horsed cavalry of 1st Cavalry Division in Northern Command or the armoured units under the command of the G.O. C.-in-C.'s Northern or Eastern Command "would at once be despatched to break up the enemy formations whilst they were still endeavouring to concentrate" and before they could effectively seize any port. Whilst the Heavy Armoured Brigade of the 1st Armoured Division stationed in East Anglia was in G.H.Q. Reserve, the G.O. C.-in-C. Eastern Command was to regard it at his immediate disposal, if it were confirmed that the enemy invasion was confined to East Anglia. There were also ample troops south of the Thames to deal with any attempt in Kent.

If necessary, the next stage would be for the larger formations of Scottish, Northern and Eastern Commands to concentrate towards the threatened area, moving by road, using the first-line transport already provided, transport earmarked to be ready at six to eight hours' notice or, in a few cases, to be requisitioned as needed. It was not felt to be practicable to place troops at shorter notice than six hours, without stopping all training and thus adding very greatly to boredom and monotony during the

14. CAB 66/3: WF(39)113, 4 Nov. 1939; and WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 7: The 'Julius Caesar' Plan, 15 Nov. 1939.

winter, and without permanently hiring transport, which would be costly and interfere with civil transport facilities, since a high degree of security could be obtained in any case without incurring these disadvantages.

Finally, the G.H.Q. Reserves of the 51st, 48th, and shortly the 55th, Divisions, together with further motorised infantry and artillery, and the Heavy Armoured Brigade, if not already committed, would be moved forward by road as circumstances demanded, using both newly provided Army first line transport and civilian road transport previously earmarked for the purpose. Second line transport, the administrative and supply vehicles run by the R.A.S.C. mostly at divisional level, was, in the case of all formations, to be hired as needed only when the emergency arose. 15.
(See Map 1.)

The major weaknesses in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan were not in General Kirke's assumptions nor in his general plan of operations, but in the fact that, although he had in November an adequate number of troops to carry out his Plan, these were often very short of training, equipment, support weapons and mobility.

The lack of training, especially in mobile warfare and often in the basic rudiments of modern warfare, was an acute and continuing problem at this early stage of the War, and was not helped by the large number of field troops that were still tied up throughout the country on static tasks. The provision of men for the guarding of vulnerable points was a problem "which had a direct bearing on plans for dealing with invasion". There was a total of no less than 34,380 rifle-armed soldiers guarding various vulnerable points, including aerodromes, which also had a number of men belonging to A.D.G.B. or the R.A.F. who were armed or being armed with small arms. This total included some 14,000 men of the National Defence Companies, but General Kirke reported to the Permanent Under Secretary of State for War on 6th November that, "at present about 20,000 men of field units are employed on these duties. This weakens very seriously many of the units that would have to be used for mobile operations. Incidentally, of course, training is much hampered." 16. Discussions with

15. *ibid.*

16. WO 166/1: *op. cit.*, November 1939. Appendix 2: Weekly Report of the C.-in-C. Home Forces, 6 Nov. 1939.

the other Services and Departments involved failed to have any marked success in reducing this commitment. On the 18th November, General Kirke reported that these discussions "were commenced primarily with the Air Ministry with a view to reducing the number of personnel so employed, but owing to the expansion of the R.A.F., it now appears that the number will tend to increase rather than decrease." 17.

By December the situation had not improved much, due to slow recruiting for the Home Defence Battalions which were to gradually replace the Field Forces in this task. General Kirke wrote on 16th December:

"I am most reluctant to provide a single soldier more than is necessary for these static duties, which I calculate are already costing the State over £5 million p.a.. It is particularly important that units of the Field Force should be relieved of their present commitments in this respect by Home Defence Battalions as soon as possible. Certain divisions are feeling the benefit of the incoming strength of the Home Defence Battalions." 18.

There were also bodies of troops distributed over the country, totaling some 158,625 in all, close to all important centres of population, who were earmarked as reserves in support of the civil authorities in case of air raids. Training was the primary activity of these troops and no divisions were specifically allotted to this task and nothing else, but their local availability meant they could be used if necessary to aid the civil power, primarily to restore law and order following the breakdown of civilian morale expected after heavy air attack, "by preventing looting, protecting lives and property, controlling crowds, and generally reinforcing the police, and also aiding in the distribution of essential supplies." In fact, "any division or unit, whether allocated to the 'Julius Caesar' Plan or not, might be called upon to perform these roles in an emergency", such was the somewhat exaggerated fear of the chaos and terror caused by bombing attacks on built-up areas at this early stage in the War, when heavy air raids on cities had yet to be experienced. 19.

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17. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 9: Weekly Report of the C.-in-C. Home Forces, 18 Nov. 1939.
 18. WO 166/1: op. cit., December 1939. Appendix 9: Weekly Report of the C.-in-C. Home Forces, 16 Dec. 1939.
 19. Interviews with Lt.Col. J. Nigel St. G. Kirke, 11 August 1981; and with Lt.Gen. Sir William G. H. Pike, formerly G.S.O. 2 (ops.) on General Kirke's staff, 18 August 1981.

However, both the troops guarding vulnerable points and those earmarked for a civil defence role were given an important function in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan by General Kirke. This was to deal with any enemy parachutists whenever they descended near the localities occupied by these troops. Fighting units could also be organised to deal with parachutists from the 160,000 men in various stages of training in training centres all over the country, while some elements of the 114,000 personnel of A.D.G.B. who manned a total of 770 heavy and 247 light anti-aircraft guns together with 3,720 Lewis light machine guns, might also be used in an anti-paratrooper role in an emergency. Any of these categories of troops might also be of some help locally against invaders by sea. ²⁰.

These local forces were supported by the remainder of the Field Army which was concentrated for training purposes according to the state of their training. (See Map 1.) The second line Territorial Divisions were mostly very dispersed, due to the fact that their primary function was training, and these only had the barest minimum of transport and equipment needed for training purposes. Most of these were situated well away from the East Coast and were not allotted anything other than a local anti-parachutist role in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan. The infantry divisions employed for the 'Julius Caesar' Plan consisted of six Territorial Divisions on the East Coast in Northern and Eastern Command, elements of three more in Scottish Command, plus the three Territorial Divisions allotted to G.H.Q. Reserve. These were in various states of concentration for training purposes, but tended to include the better trained and equipped formations. These divisions were all being prepared for active operations by the gradual provision of first line transport up to War Establishment, including the provision of towing vehicles for the few available guns, and by the issue of ammunition. All these divisions had mobile detachments, which included carriers ready to move at various degrees of warning, and they were not tied to static tasks. ²¹.

However, all the 'Julius Caesar' divisions lacked a great deal of their transport and equipment in November, and much of the little they had was virtually obsolete and suitable only for a training role, yet these

20. CAB 66/3: WP(39)113, 4 Nov. 1939; and WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 7: 'Julius Caesar' Plan, 15 Nov. 1939.

21. *ibid.*

divisions were supposed to be "prepared for active operations"! The years of neglect in Britain before the War meant she possessed a totally inadequate armaments industry and what little modern equipment that could be manufactured had largely been sent with the British Expeditionary Force to France. The little artillery that was available for the 'Julius Caesar' divisions, consisted almost entirely of obsolete 18 pdr. field guns and 4.5" howitzers, the modern 25 pdrs. and converted 18/25 pdrs. having nearly all been sent overseas. There were only a handful of 2 pdr. anti-tank guns available and these had only half their War Establishment quota of ammunition. In most cases, much of the divisions' first line transport had not yet been provided and only the guns and the divisional reconnaissance regiments were fully mobile. The divisions were short of Bren or Lewis light machine guns and Vickers .303" heavy machine guns, while the few 3" mortars available had only 25% of their proper issue of ammunition. 22. (See Appendix 2.)

In General Sir Charles J. C. Grant's Scottish Command, part of the 15th (Scottish) Division was being prepared for active operations for use, if required, to reinforce the Edinburgh and Forth area, while elements of the 9th (Scottish) in the Highlands and the 52nd (Lowland) Division in the Glasgow area were to be employed if necessary. However, there was only enough transport in Scottish Command to equip the equivalent of one division, artillery was minimal and there was not a single 2 pdr. anti-tank gun in the whole of Scotland! 23.

The situation was little better in General Sir William H. 'Barty' Bartholomew's Northern Command, where the 42nd (East Lancashire) and the 49th (West Riding) Divisions had been prepared for active operations in Northumberland and Yorkshire, respectively. However, this Command had been reinforced by the 1st Light Armoured Brigade with its 77 light tanks situated near Selby, and it also had the rather dubious benefit of the 6,000 horsed cavalry of the 1st (Yeomanry) Cavalry Division, although this was removed from General Kirke's operative command on 1st December, preparatory to being shipped to the Middle East. General Kirke was probably not too sorry to see it go, since its horses - polo horses, riding

22. *ibid.*

23. WO 166/1: *op. cit.*, October 1939. Appendix E: Minutes of C.-in-C.'s Conference, 30 Oct. 1939.

horses, police horses, circus horses - had had to be requisitioned from everywhere and he had received "a torrent of letters from animal lovers protesting about the Army's alleged cruel treatment of horses, because horses accustomed to the comforts of stables were being tethered Army style in lines in the open air!" 24.

In the Eastern Command, under Lieutenant General Sir Guy C. Williams, four Territorial Divisions and the newly arrived 1st Armoured Division were allotted to the 'Julius Caesar' Plan. These, however, only had enough vehicles to provide first line transport for the equivalent of three divisions. In the vulnerable East Anglian area the 18th (East Anglian) and the 54th (East Anglian) Divisions were being prepared for active operations concentrating eastwards, the 18th to cover the long Norfolk coast and the vital ports of Yarmouth and Lowestoft, and the 54th to cover the Suffolk and Essex coastline, including Felixstowe and, the port felt to be most vulnerable of all, Harwich. South of the Thames the 1st London (56th) Division was being prepared for active operations along the Sussex and South Kent coastline together, while the 12th (Eastern) Division guarded North Kent. The East Kent coastline was not yet felt to be particularly exposed, since it mainly consisted of cliffs and it was a difficult journey for any expedition coming from North Germany in any case. Neither Division south of the Thames had any anti-tank guns and the only artillery in this area were 24 obsolete field guns with 1st London Division. 25.

The equipment situation was little better in the exposed East Anglian area, where the 18th and 54th Divisions had a total of only six 2 pdr. anti-tank guns between them out of a theoretical War Establishment of 48 each, and only 26 and 18 field guns respectively, all obsolete 18 pdrs. or 4.5" howitzers, out of a theoretical 72 apiece. The successful defence of East Anglia rested largely, therefore, on the 1st Armoured Division, which was held at short notice ready to move to the coast. Its 2nd Light Armoured Brigade, comprising 126 light tanks and the supporting divisional infantry and artillery elements, were placed under the control of Lieutenant General Williams in West Suffolk and North-West Essex, whereas the 3rd Heavy

24. Interview with Lt.Col. J. Nigel St. G. Kirke, 11 August 1981.

25. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 7: The 'Julius Caesar' Plan, 15 Nov. 1939.

Armoured Brigade of 64 light tanks and a mere 25 Cruiser tanks was held back in Hertfordshire in G.H.Q. Reserve. This gave a total of 215 tanks with which to guard East Anglia, but only the 25 Cruisers had 2 pdr. anti-tank guns. All the rest were Vickers light tanks armed only with machine guns and with armour that was hardly capable of stopping a bullet! However, they were not expected to have to deal with enemy armour.²⁶ This Division also maintained an improvised column formed "to deal with any local parachutists who might be dropped in the area, in order that the division proper may not be diverted from its main operative role". This column included a company of the Rifle Brigade, spare teams of tanks and also boasted obsolete Vickers medium tanks "which, on account of their slow speed, are not included in the Heavy Brigade for operative purposes".²⁷ There were no heavy Infantry tanks with 1st Armoured Division, these being allocated solely to 1st Army Tank Brigade, which, being earmarked for France, was under War Office control and was not given a role in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan.

Lieutenant General Sir Guy C. Williams was very much aware of the vulnerability of his Command and especially of East Anglia. In December he confided his worries to Major General R. Pakenham Walsh, who was on leave from the B.E.F. over Christmas, and who afterwards recalled:

"He had a ration strength of a quarter million in the Command, including the Armoured Division sent up for a scare some weeks ago. He thinks the Boche next effort may be against the East Coast ports to try and throttle our minesweeper-minelayers etc., which are crowded into Yarmouth and Lowestoft and Harwich. Paget now commands 18th Division and has become obsessed with the defence of East Anglia."²⁸

As a last resort, General Kirke could order the G.H.Q. Reserve Divisions to the aid of either Northern or Eastern Command. The 51st (Highland) and the 48th (S. Midland) Divisions, situated at present at Aldershot and Hungerford respectively, were closely concentrated and were in a comparatively advanced state of training, since they were earmarked to be the first to go abroad. They were by early November prepared for active operations as a G.H.Q. Reserve and were shortly to be joined by

26. *ibid.*

27. WO 166/1: *op. cit.*, November 1939. Appendix 3: Notes on Visit to 1st Armoured Division, 7 Nov. 1939.

28. Diary of Major General R. Pakenham-Walsh, 25 Dec. 1939.

the 55th (W. Lancashire) Division, which was to move in late November from Chester in Western Command to the Charnwood Forest training area, near Leicester, so as to cover the emptiness of the Humber-Wash area in Northern Command. (See Map 1.) Eastern Command was ordered to reconnoitre suitable concentration areas for two divisions in East Anglia and for one division in the Home Counties area, while Northern Command was similarly responsible for reconnoitring a concentration area for the 55th Division in the Northern Command area. In the event of an emergency, the G.H.Q. Reserve Divisions would be ordered to concentrate forward by road and to enable them to do this these three divisions, plus three independent infantry battalions and three artillery field regiments, were being provided with first line transport. ²⁹.

In the case of both the G.H.Q. Reserve and the East Coast divisions much of the first line transport had to be obtained from civilians by provisional arrangements, which caused some serious problems. This was often obtained on a voluntary hiring basis, which was not only costly, but led to the difficulty that "the owners of transport are very reluctant to allow their vehicles to be driven by soldiers, who may do the vehicles considerable damage". ³⁰. Alternatively, civilian transport, especially for second line transport and for troop carrying, was often earmarked ready for hiring at short notice on payment of a retaining fee. However, in mid November, instructions were issued that "the hiring or earmarking by payment of a retaining fee of transport in connection with the Defence Plan against invasion should cease forthwith". ³¹. This meant that transport not already taken by the Army would have to be hired or requisitioned when the emergency arose. General Kirke realised that, although this was less costly, it was an unsatisfactory arrangement which could jeopardise the early movement of the vital reserves to counter-attack any landing. On 13th November, he reported to the War Office:

"It has become apparent that any scheme for the provision of troop carrying transport, which relies on the requisitioning of transport when an emergency arises, is doomed to failure. There can be no security that adequate transport with drivers would be forthcoming without great delay.

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29. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 7: The 'Julius Caesar' Plan, 15 Nov. 1939.
30. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 2: Weekly Report by the C.-in-C. Home Forces, 6 Nov. 1939.
31. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 9: Weekly Report by the C.-in-C. Home Forces, 13 Nov. 1939.



Detailed arrangements must be made beforehand, even if some cost is involved." 32.

In the case of collecting buses for troop carrying in an emergency, not only would the buses and drivers be scattered in the daytime, but:

"It has been pointed out that if warning of an emergency were received late in the evening, it would be impossible to begin to collect the buses until the next morning, as the drivers would be scattered in their homes and unobtainable until they came to work." 33.

The War Office, however, was unmoved and the present makeshift arrangements had to continue in spite of the obvious disadvantages. General Kirke had to accept that the solution would only come slowly:

"Adequate security can only be provided if Troop Carrying Companies, R.A.S.C. are organised. The formation of these companies will doubtless take some time and, until further instructions are received from the War Office, the provisional arrangements which had been made by Commands must continue." 34.

The chronic shortage of equipment, too, was a major problem even for these divisions in the G.H.Q. Reserve, which represented the final and decisive line of defence against an invasion. The three G.H.Q. divisions should each have had an establishment of 72 field guns. In fact, the 51st only had 36 field guns, the 48th was better off with 52, while the 55th had a mere 14. All the field guns were the obsolete 18 pdrs. or 4.5" howitzers, though the unattached 12th Field Regiment with 24 x 25 pdrs. was also in G.H.Q. Reserve at Larkhill in Southern Command, though this only had transport for half its guns. The anti-tank gun situation was even worse, since there was a desperate shortage of 2 pdrs. and most of the few available had gone to France. Out of a theoretical establishment of 64 anti-tank guns per division, the 51st had 26, the 48th only 8, and the 55th none at all! 35. (See Appendix 2.) In fact,

32. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 5: Weekly Report of the C.-in-C. Home Forces, Appendix A: Provision of Transport, 13 Nov. 1939.

33. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 2: Weekly Report of the C.-in-C. Home Forces, 6 Nov. 1939.

34. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 5: Weekly Report of the C.-in-C. Home Forces, Appendix A: Provision of Transport, 13 Nov. 1939.

35. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 7: The 'Julius Caesar' Plan, 15 Nov. 1939.

so acute was the shortage of anti-tank guns in Home Forces in both the G.H.Q. Reserve and the divisions allotted to the 'Julius Caesar' Plan on the East Coast, that the crews of the 18 pdr. field guns were provided with anti-tank gun ammunition and trained to fire over open sights, while the crews of Bofors light anti-aircraft guns were also trained in an anti-tank role. ^{36.}

It was expected, in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan, that a landing at any point protected by the fixed coastal defences would be impractical unless those defences had been eliminated or neutralised. Since this would take some time if carried out by gunfire or bombing, it was anticipated that these might be captured by parachute or M.T.B. landed infantry from the vulnerable landward side, landward defences for ports being virtually non-existent at this time. Therefore, as an additional precaution, Scottish, Northern and Eastern Commands were ordered to provide efficient local infantry protection for the ports and fixed defences in their respective areas, with particular emphasis on those at the Humber and Harwich, while 18 pdrs. were to be sited to provide local artillery protection for Aberdeen, Dundee, Lowestoft and Ramsgate. ^{37.} Theoretically, there was no possibility of a "coup de main" against a port from the sea since the whole coast was under constant observation by the Observer Corps and units of A.D.G.B. and, in any case, the most vulnerable ports had already been mined out to sea, leaving only narrow entrance passages. ^{38.}

Close liaison with the other Services was also provided for in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan. In the event of an enemy landing, Home Forces was to have the direct support of two bomber squadrons, No. 16 Army Co-Operation Squadron and three communication aircraft. The other Services were to provide air reconnaissance and naval patrols by day and on moonlit nights to detect shipping concentrations or convoys in the German coastal or North Sea areas; bomber squadrons were to be kept in

36. Interview with Lt.Col. J. Nigel St. G. Kirke, 11 August 1981.

37. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 7: The 'Julius Caesar' Plan, 15 Nov. 1939.

38. Interviews with Lt.Col. J. Nigel St. G. Kirke, 11 August 1981; and with Lt.Gen. Sir William G. H. Pike, 18 August 1981.

immediate readiness to bomb these before departure or in passage; light naval forces to cover the North Sea, and fighter and anti-aircraft defences to counter the expected German troop carrying planes and covering aerial offensive. 39.

The general public were kept entirely in ignorance of the measures affecting the civilian population which were outlined in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan, and were indeed unaware of the existence of the 'Julius Caesar' Plan, in any case, for obvious security reasons. The Plan represented very secret contingency planning, and, since the chances of an invasion occurring were felt to be very small, to inform the public of any anti-invasion measures which concerned the civilian population might alarm the population unnecessarily and cause an outcry that would be detrimental to the morale of the country as a whole. 40.

Little provision had been made for the civil population in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan anyway. No evacuation of any portion of the civilian population on the threatened East Coast was made at this time and, in fact, no such plans existed in the winter of 1939-40. In the event of an invasion, the population not in any immediate danger would be "encouraged to stay in their homes by broadcast or other means". However, it was realised there would be a movement of refugees from the area of operations itself which would hamper the execution of the military plan unless it was kept under control. The Plan stated:

"It is not considered practical or desirable to endeavour to hold up the exodus of the civil population whose lives are in danger, but such movements should be controlled and diverted so that military two-way roads into the theatre of operations are kept clear of all civil traffic."

Close liaison was to be maintained with the police and Regional Commissioners on this and other civil matters, and military considerations were to predominate in cases where troops were earmarked to aid the civil powers. Since it was expected that both the seaborne and airborne landing forces would be eliminated within a short space of time, it was not regarded as being either desirable or practicable to destroy motor transport, petrol stores, public utilities, communications or food stocks, and

39. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 7: The 'Julius Caesar' Plan, 15 Nov. 1939.

40. Interview with Lt.Col. J. Nigel St. G. Kirke, 11 August 1981.

the short term immobilisation of cranes and docking facilities at ports and temporary denial of telephone and telegraph communications was all that was envisaged.

General Kirke's whole plan was based on the not unreasonable assumption that it would be possible to give a minimum of eight hours' notice of any attempted large-scale invasion or raid, and the plans of the G.O. C.-in-C.'s of Commands were to be framed accordingly. For the purpose of repelling invasion, all troops in Britain, except A.D.G.B., were to be under the command or operational control of the C.-in-C. Home Forces, but, to prevent delay through waiting for orders, immediate action was to be taken by the nearest formation to repel the invader, and G.O. C.-in-C.'s of the Command or Commands were to be responsible for the conduct of the battle in their Command area. ⁴¹.

At the same time as General Kirke was compiling his plans in November the Chief of Staff Committee too was considering the problems posed by the threat of airborne or seaborne raids. On the 4th November, they set up the Port Defence Committee "to advise the Chiefs of Staff on all matters connected with coast defence at home" as well as on coast and anti-aircraft defences of ports abroad. ⁴². One of the new Committee's first tasks was to consider guarding the Orkney and Shetland Islands against the possibility of seaborne or airborne raids or sabotage parties landed during the long winter nights to capture the secret R.D.F. or C.D. stations there or to wreck the seaplane base at Sullom Voe, and the garrison and anti-aircraft defences there were consequently strengthened towards the end of the month. ⁴³. Another problem the Chiefs of Staff felt should be further examined in General Kirke's plans was the protection of aerodromes, and they suggested arming a proportion of the R.A.F. personnel with rifles, making use of light automatics for ground defence, and generally co-ordinating the defence schemes "as the military guards were not numerous and could not be materially reinforced". ⁴⁴.

41. WO 166/1: op. cit., November 1939. Appendix 7: The 'Julius Caesar' Plan, 15 Nov. 1939.

42. CAB 79/1: COS 68th(39):4, 4 Nov. 1939; and CAB 80/4, COS(39) 110, 3 Nov. 1939.

43. CAB 80/5: PDC(39) 8 (also COS(39) 131), 25 Nov. 1939.

44. CAB 79/1: COS 67th(39):2, 3 Nov. 1939; and COS 80th(39):2, 15 Nov. 1939.

No German threat was envisaged to neutral Southern Ireland at all at this stage of the War, nor indeed until after Dunkirk. The 'Julius Caesar' Plan looked east and not west, and it took no defensive posture against Ireland. A brigade of the 53rd (Welsh) Division had been sent to Ulster in October, but these troops were for internal security purposes only, especially to maintain peace in the industrially important city of Belfast. (See Map 1.) The Irish Army posed no threat and the Irish were unlikely to be openly hostile anyway, for fear of annoying the Americans. 45.

On the 18th November, the Chiefs of Staff Committee approved the Joint Planning Sub-Committee's long awaited report on seaborne and air-borne attack on the United Kingdom, which had been asked for as long ago as the 21st October, and which had now been overtaken by events. The report's outline of the possible course of events had already been anticipated and its recommendations put in hand in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan. The Chiefs of Staff appeared satisfied with the anti-invasion measures now being implemented and felt that they were adequate. Regarding invasion by means of a combined air and seaborne expedition, the report concluded that:

"So long as our naval and air forces remain in being and provided the necessary precautions are maintained effectively, such attacks do not constitute a serious threat to our security."

The Chiefs of Staff also approved the report's reassuring conclusion that:

"The risk of such attacks does not justify interference with the training of the Field Force in its proper role, or the retention in this country of field formations destined for employment elsewhere. When the bulk of the Field Force had been despatched overseas, it should not be difficult to devise some special provision against this risk." 46.

General Kirke's 'Julius Caesar' Plan sounded very reasonable to the War Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff, who both remained satisfied until the spring and, though certain weaknesses in it are apparent, the plan was basically sound and fitted the threat envisaged at the time. In any case,

45. Interview with Lt.Col. J. Nigel St. G. Kirke, 11 August 1981.

46. CAB 79/1: COS 82nd(39):5, 18 Nov. 1939; and CAB 80/5, COS(39) 125, 18 Nov. 1939.

the Germans were very unlikely to attempt such a risky operation across the North Sea and there was only a very remote chance that the plan would have to be put into operation. In view of the fact that the Germans would have had to make a long sea crossing to reach East Anglia from the North German ports, let alone Scotland, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire or Kent, in a large convoy with little naval or long-range air protection, which would be vulnerable not only to the Royal Navy and the R.A.F., but also to the hazards of the tides and weather in the winter months, with the prospect of an opposed landing, heavy counter-attacks on land by superior numbers and long and dangerous sea communications, then the possibility that the Germans would try anything of this nature was almost fanciful. For example, it would have taken 50-60 transports, not 20, to carry even one division to our coasts and the crossing from North Germany would have taken at least 36 hours, not 20 as General Kirke envisaged. 47.

The 'Julius Caesar' Plan, therefore, represented "good contingency planning" - contingency planning being the normal role of armies everywhere. There was always the possibility, however remote, that the Germans would take a wild gamble on an invasion and this possibility could not be ignored. General Kirke, though he believed personally that invasion was impossible until Holland fell, made every effort to do the planning properly. There was "never any question of merely producing something to keep the politicians happy". General Kirke was always ready to listen to the opposing views and "realised he could not be right about everything". So it was, when it came to the matter of invasion. The 'Julius Caesar' Plan was therefore taken very seriously at G.H.Q. Home Forces. 48.

The major weaknesses of the 'Julius Caesar' Plan lay in the fact that, even though General Kirke had put his minimum requirements at seven divisions, consisting of not less than one division each in Northern and Scottish Commands, two in Eastern Command and three in G.H.Q. Reserve, and there were the equivalent of no less than 14 available, these formations were generally as yet inadequately trained and equipped for mobile

47. Collier, Basil: History of the Second World War: The Defence of the United Kingdom, p. 84. H.M.S.O., London. 1957.

48. Interview with Lt.Col. J. Nigel St. G. Kirke, 11 August 1981.

warfare, the lack of transport being especially evident, and that the best of them could be expected to be ordered abroad as soon as they were ready for despatch.⁴⁹ Even so, the 'Julius Caesar' Plan was to form the basis of the plans for Home Defence throughout the first winter of the War and, indeed, right up to the dark days of May 1940.

49. H.F. Bundle 47/9, Paper 13A, 15 Dec. 1939; and Collier, Basil: op. cit., p. 85.

CHAPTER 3: A QUIET WINTER

Throughout the 'Phoney War' of 1939-40 the emphasis in Home Forces was on training and equipping divisions for service on the Continent with the British Expeditionary Force, and sending them abroad. The B.E.F. itself spent much of this time of the 'bore war' digging anti-tank ditches, stringing barbed wire and constructing pillboxes along the French frontier with Belgium in an attempt to extend the Maginot Line to the sea. Official doctrine at this time was still obsessed with the overriding power of defensive lines and with the belief that static firepower was the answer to modern warfare. In spite of the awful demonstration of the Blitzkrieg combination of tanks and dive-bombers in Poland in September 1939, the Allies were still preparing to meet the expected onslaught in terms of the 1914-18 war. The only difference seemed to be to the British senior commanders that "such defensive positions now no longer consist of continuous lines of trenches with communication trenches from rear to front", but of "lines of anti-tank obstacles with strong points commanding them and small works in between". Wherever possible, these new works were to be carefully concealed, and they partly made use of a river line. The use of mobile armoured forces in an offensive or even in a counter-attack role was largely ignored.¹

Between October 1939 and May 1940 the B.E.F. constructed over 400 concrete pillboxes in a system of defence in depth in the 66 kilometre Lille sector that they had been allotted to defend, and by May 1940 the density of pillboxes had been raised to six per kilometre in the front-line positions. To enable speed of construction, five standard types were approved, with special types for unusual sites. This standardisation of design aided the builders, who made use of steel shuttering that could be used again repeatedly so as to assist mass production. Major General Pakenham-Walsh, Chief Engineer to the B.E.F., recalled that:

"The Commander-in-Chief decided to build pillboxes by mass production methods in lines to give depth to the position..... I got out five standard types of pillboxes, for which King (my D.E. in C.) and French worked out details and standard steel shuttering. The types were given to Corps, who were told to use them in the layout of the position."²

1. Ironside Papers: Notes of C.I.G.S.'s Visit to the B.E.F., 29 Nov. - 2 Dec. 1939.

2. Diary of Major General Pakenham-Walsh, 19 Nov. 1939.

The B.E.F. were soon to leave these defences untested and move forward to fight the enemy in open country, but the experience gained in construction works and their siting and overall layout were to have a strong influence later on plans to defend the United Kingdom.

These preparations contrasted with the situation at home, where no attempt was made at the time to prepare static defences and where the defence planners became obsessed with the new problem posed by parachutists, often to the exclusion of anything else. Although the threat of a German invasion by sea, especially during the winter months, was now thought to be very unlikely, this unease about the threat of parachutists descending from the skies, combined with a mistaken belief that a strong fifth column existed in Britain, continued throughout the winter and spring of 1939-40. This feeling of insecurity in Britain was skilfully exploited by the Germans, who continued to see that alarmist reports filtered through to the United Kingdom, most likely in a not altogether unsuccessful attempt to delay the reinforcement of the B.E.F. by keeping British troops at home tied up in anti-sabotage duties. The reports were received amid a background of persistent small-scale bombing attacks on coastal shipping or actions by minelaying aircraft along the East Coast or on Scapa Flow, which tended perhaps to add to their credibility. On 22nd December, Home Forces received notification from the War Office "from an informant of some reliance", that "volunteers have been called for in Kiel to act as saboteurs in England", and two days later Commands were informed that "German saboteurs may be landed in England", though no additional security measures were considered necessary.³ A few days later, on 2nd January, the War Office informed Home Forces that "the German Intelligence Service is contemplating sabotage in England, to destroy (i) ammunition factories, (ii) dock areas, (iii) water supplies in principal cities."⁴

By February, however, Headquarters, Home Forces, were becoming increasingly sceptical about the risks of sabotage. In a summary prepared for the Deputy Chiefs of Staff Committee on 7th February, it was stated that:

"In the opinion of Headquarters, Home Forces, the risks of sabotage have in no way increased as a result of five months of war; in fact, there is reason to think that possible dangers may have been overestimated. No cases of sabotage conclusively caused by aliens, I.R.A. or other organised bodies have been brought to notice; and it would be interesting to know if other

3. WO 166/1: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, G.H.Q. Home Forces, December 1939.

4. WO 166/1: op. cit., January 1940.

Government departments have any reason to think there has been any sabotage other than the doubtful cases which occur from time to time in industry as the handiwork of discontented workmen." 5.

General Kirke, himself, continued to have a low opinion of any alarmist reports, since they were often based on the slenderest of evidence and almost invariably turned out to be untrue, and he strongly opposed their wide circulation. In his weekly report to the Permanent Under Secretary of State for War on 10th February, he complained:

"On the night of 6th/7th February, a scare message was given the widest circulation throughout the country, to the effect that the enemy was strewing the East Coast with balloons containing a dangerous gas which exploded on touch and which should be handled with great care. I am endeavouring to trace the originator of this report, which is now known to be without foundation, but a deplorable feature of the whole affair is the way in which this message was broadcast by Civil and Service Authorities without due investigation of its authenticity." 6.

Even so, however obviously alarmist the rumours, the dangers of sabotage or raids by fifth column or parachutists could not be safely ignored, and the necessity for providing guards for vulnerable points continued to be an irritating thorn in the side of Home Forces all through the winter and spring of 1940, tying up thousands of troops in a profitless static role, who should have been undergoing intensive training for modern warfare. The question of reducing the number of guards was, therefore, of paramount importance, since so many of these troops were being supplied by the Field Army. The guarding of vulnerable points was also a boring job for the young and active soldiers of the Field Force, and Headquarters, Home Forces, regarded this commitment as "a terrible drain, which greatly interfered with training" and as "a tremendous eater-up of troops". 7.

General Kirke fought a continuous battle to try and reduce the numbers of Field troops employed in this task. On 13th January, he reported to the Permanent Under Secretary that:

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5. WO 166/1: op. cit., February 1940. Appendix B: The Provision of Military Protection for Vulnerable Points, 7 Feb. 1940.
 6. WO 166/1: op. cit., February 1940. Appendix C: Weekly Report of the C.-in-C. Home Forces, 10 Feb. 1940.
 7. Interviews with Lt.Col. J. Nigel St. G. Kirke, son of Sir Walter and formerly G.S.O. 3(ops.) on his staff, 11 Aug. 1981; and with Lt. Gen. Sir William G. H. Pike, formerly G.S.O. 2(ops.) on General Kirke's staff, 18 Aug. 1981.

"Demands from various departments for guards for so-called vulnerable points are steadily increasing - whereas the strength of the troops intended to provide these guards, i.e. the Home Defence Battalions, is still a long way short of the numbers needed for existing requirements.

A large number of guards are still being found by men of the Field Army, thereby interfering with their training for their proper role. Allowing for rest and relief, the numbers of men required to meet existing commitments is estimated at over 50,000, and this number will soon increase to over 60,000.

I, therefore, propose to allot the troops which are available to carry out only the tasks which I consider to be the most important." 8.

By 25th January 1940, the total number of troops employed in the task of guarding vulnerable points had risen from 33,900 on 30th September 1939 to 38,400, an increase of approximately 4,500 in four months. Of the January total, no less than 15,600 troops were still being found from the Field Force and the other 22,800 were from the Home Defence Battalions, compared with about 20,000 and 14,000, respectively, on 6th November 1939.

Even so, the number of Field troops employed in guarding vulnerable points remained much too high and by early February the problem was becoming an increasingly serious one for Home Forces and was actually affecting the moves of formations, both within the United Kingdom and, indirectly, to France. Headquarters, Home Forces, was to report on 7th February:

"Now that a number of divisions have gone overseas and certain divisions are being moved at home, either for training purposes or for Home Defence reasons, it is becoming increasingly difficult to allot personnel for the protection of vulnerable points. Cases are about to occur in which there will be no Field Force troops available in certain areas after the middle of March..... Our future war effort is, therefore, already being affected." 9.

General Kirke emphasised the seriousness of the problem in his weekly report three days later:

"Cases are now occurring where projected moves of Field Army formations, in the normal course of training for service overseas, are being interfered with by vulnerable point commitments.

For example, the 61st Division, which it was intended should move to East Anglia in March, is unable to do so, because it has over 2,000 men on vulnerable points with no Home Defence troops available in relief. This difficulty can be bridged by sending the 55th Division instead.

8. WO 166/1: op. cit., January 1940. Appendix C: Weekly Report of the C.-in-C. Home Forces, 13 Jan. 1940.

9. WO 166/1: op. cit., February 1940. Appendix B: The Provision of Military Protection for Vulnerable Points, 7 Feb. 1940.

The 45th Division, which it is proposed to include in the 4th Contingent, must concentrate for training, but this Division has some 2,600 men on vulnerable points. I hope to be able to cover this by moving two brigades of the 38th Division from the Western Command, which is not altogether a satisfactory arrangement.

The 66th Division, which is due to move to Northern Command when the 49th Division goes, has also a large number of men on vulnerable points. Here I may be able to find a solution by making use of Holding Battalions and a general decision that Holding Battalions may be used for guarding vulnerable points up to a third of their strength at a time has been promulgated.

In the meantime, a Vulnerable Point Sub Committee of the Deputy Chiefs of Staff Committee is reviewing the vulnerable point situation and on this Committee my staff represent my views. In due course, this may lead to reduction of some of the existing guards, though it would appear possible that before these results have been achieved I will be obliged to remove all guards found by the Field Army in certain areas, regardless of whether these vulnerable points are of primary importance or not, because unless this is done our main war effort will be seriously hampered." 10.

By 9th March, there were still 13,500 men of the Field Army or Holding Battalions employed as guards out of a total of 37,000 on vulnerable points. General Kirke, who had just received news of the War Office decision to send portions of three low category divisions (the 12th, 23rd and 46th Divisions) to France for labour duties, again emphasised in his weekly report that "such projects tend to emphasise the necessity for an immediate reduction of vulnerable points, as with each move the burden of the Field Army divisions which remain is correspondingly increased." 11. The remaining 23,500 guards represented only a small increase, due to the slowness of recruiting for the Home Defence Battalions, which were still being afforded a relatively low priority, despite the Adjutant General some months ago urging that "all possible steps to enlist personnel for the Home Defence Battalions" must be taken. 12.

However, General Kirke's fears of an increase in the total numbers employed on guarding vulnerable points and its serious implications on Home Defence and on reinforcement to the B.E.F. proved unfounded, since the

10. WO 166/1: op. cit., February 1940. Appendix C: Weekly Report of the C.-in-C. Home Forces, 10 Feb. 1940.

11. WO 166/1: op. cit., March 1940. Appendix C: Weekly Report of the C.-in-C. Home Forces, 9 March 1940.

12. WO 166/1: op. cit., March 1940. Appendix I: Agenda of C.-in-C.'s Conference, 29 March 1940.

savings in manpower eventually effected by the Vulnerable Points Sub-Committee proved greater than he forecast, though a proportion of this saving was constantly swallowed up in fresh vulnerable point commitments, such as the Neutral European Port scheme, the relief of Royal Naval and Royal Marine guards and in supplying guards for new R.A.F. establishments. Further net savings of 6,500 men during March and April succeeded in reducing the total commitment to 30,500 by 20th April. Of these, 24,000 men were from the Home Defence Battalions, leaving only 4,500 to be supplied by the Field Force, and 2,000 by Holding units. A considerable reduction of the Field Force's commitment, made doubly necessary because of the number of Field Force formations being sent to France and Norway at this time, was at last being achieved, and not before time. ¹³.

There was little pressure from the French over the winter and spring of 1939-40 for the B.E.F. to be built up at the expense of Home Forces. Only on 19th December 1939, at a meeting of the Supreme War Council, had Monsieur Daladier, then President du Conseil, urged an acceleration of the rate of despatch of British effectives to France, though he hastened to add that "France was unanimous in recognising that Great Britain had fulfilled her undertakings up to the hilt". Mr. Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, had pointed out in reply that:

"The immense difficulty of transporting, equipping and maintaining a large Expeditionary Force made it extremely unlikely, however, that Britain could go beyond her present commitments. The problem of equipping the Force was, of course, the determining factor. He felt certain that the promised total of ten fully equipped divisions by the 1st March represented the absolute limit of what the British side could contribute up to that date."

M. Daladier, recognizing that the existing British effort was considerable and that the problem of equipment was a very serious one, had to accept this. ¹⁴. There was no further pressure for the Supreme War Council on this matter until the end of May, by which time practically all the best trained and equipped British forces were fully engaged in France, in any case, and Home Forces were at their barest minimum. Indeed, in February 1940, the fully trained 42nd and 44th Divisions, due for immediate despatch to the B.E.F., were actually held back until early April, with full French

13. WO 166/1: op. cit., April 1940, Appendix D: Minutes of C.-in-C.'s Conference, 24 April 1940.

14. CAB 99/3: SWC(39/40)4th:6, 19 Dec. 1939.

agreement, for possible intervention in Finland, though, in the event, Finland surrendered to the Russians before help could be sent; and in April the 15th Brigade of the 5th (Regular) Division was, in fact, sent to Norway from the B.E.F., again with full French agreement, since it was hoped that the Allied forces sent to Norway would draw off substantial German forces from the Western Front. ¹⁵ General Kirke, therefore, was at no time under severe pressure to accelerate the training and equipping of formations for despatch overseas beyond the programme already laid down.

On the 6th January 1940, General Kirke lost an ally when Hore-Belisha was sacked as Secretary of State for War. Hore-Belisha, in spite of his sometimes rather high-handed approach, had done a lot for the British Army during his period of office. General Kirke, unlike General Ironside, had often seen eye to eye with Hore-Belisha and he lamented his going:

"Hore-Belisha was sacked, to my regret Hore-Belisha's great contribution was to put the Civil Service into their rightly subordinate place, which no other Secretary of State had ever achieved." ¹⁶

General Kirke was less happy dealing with Hore-Belisha's successor as Secretary of State for War, Oliver Stanley, who, unlike Hore-Belisha, allowed himself to be unduly influenced by the Civil Service:

"This was now changed by the opposition of the Permanent Under Secretary to MacDougall being appointed as Major General of the General Staff, to succeed Anderson [on 5th February], and he [the P.U.S.] was supported by the Secretary of State against the military members of the Army Council and the Selection Board - a scandalous affair, which marred an otherwise conscientious performance of his duties." ¹⁷

General Kirke considered that the chances of an invasion during the winter months were very remote, if indeed they ever existed, and he accordingly relaxed the anti-invasion preparations to some degree at the end of January, by moving the 1st Armoured Division in H.Q. Reserve back to its training area in Dorset. Lieutenant-General Sir William G. H. Pike, then a Major, who was appointed G.S.O. 2 (Ops.) on General Kirke's staff on 15th

15. CAB 99/3: SWC(39/40)5th:1, 5 Feb. 1940.

16. Kirke Papers: Home Defence File: Notes left by General Sir Walter Kirke, 1939-1940.

17. *ibid.*

January, recalled of the spring of 1940 that "there was no thought of invasion at this time".¹⁸ General Kirke steadfastly held to his belief that it was impossible for the Germans to mount an invasion until they captured the Dutch coastline and could base their air force in that country. He firmly believed that the war should be fought on the Continent by the B.E.F. and that only an adequate force was necessary in the United Kingdom to deter invasion. Following Oliver Stanley's appointment, he recalled that:

"Nothing whatsoever could be got for Home Defence from now on until Holland was attacked. I had one interview on the subject with Oliver Stanley shortly before the Cabinet was reconstituted [on 10th May] and he went out. I said that until Holland was taken the rumours of invasion of England did not worry me, and that the Cabinet should concentrate on preparing and strengthening the Expeditionary Force. This was equally useful for supporting the French or resisting invasion, should conditions in the future make that possible." 19.

General Kirke continued, therefore, to see the primary task of Home Forces as being to train and equip the British Army for service overseas and this activity remained his top priority throughout the winter and spring of 1939-40, right up until the fall of Holland in May. General Kirke threw himself into supervising the forces under his command in this vital task of training. Never a desk general, he spent most of his time away from Headquarters, visiting troops and formations all over the country, observing or conducting exercises of all types and making his comments known afterwards, and attending conferences on questions relating to Home Defence. At the end of February, he also paid a two-day visit to the B.E.F. in France to discuss matters with Lord Gort.²⁰

However, in spite of General Kirke's efforts, the process of turning the thousands of civilians in uniform into proper soldiers remained a slow one. The consequences of years of neglect before the war were now being felt most acutely. Progress in training the forces in Britain was continually being hampered by lack of equipment to practise on, especially since almost all the most modern equipment, now coming slowly from the factories, was shipped straight out to the B.E.F.. At a conference of the G.O. C.-in-C.'s on 29th March, it was pointed out that:

18. Interview with Lt.-Gen. Sir William G. H. Pike, 18 August 1981.

19. Kirke Papers: op. cit.

20. WO 166/1: op. cit., Jan.-April 1940.

"The majority of officers and men in mobile artillery units have never seen a gun fired, and until they do so, do not know what they are working to produce.... It is intended that all mobile artillery units shall attend practice camps this summer. However, arms and equipment may affect matters." 21.

Sir Auckland Geddes was far more critical of the progress of training, though he was perhaps unfairly harsh on General Kirke. In February, he wrote:

"This army business is worse than could have been believed. These second line T.F. divisions are more than a menace. The rubbish we have got here is appalling, and the officers! My God! But the really frightening thing is the way the conscripts are being rotted. No discipline, no training, apparently no equipment. I had no idea Walter Kirke was so bad and the C.I.G.S. doesn't seem to be much better.

The spirit of the conscripts is deplorable. 'They have called us up - now what are they going to do with us?' So different from 1914-15, with everybody a volunteer trying to make himself efficient."

He ended his memoranda on an ominously prophetic note:

"This phoney war stuff is likely to end with the spring and then look out for squalls...." 22.

* * *

General Kirke's 'Julius Caesar' Plan for dealing with invasion or raids by sea and air, remained basically unchanged throughout the spring of 1940 up to the end of May, and while frequent amendments were made to it during this period, these were mainly to clarify or alter details and did not alter the principles of the plan. An Amendment in December 1939, further emphasized the unlikelihood of the Germans making an attempt at invasion and pointed out the many difficulties that the enemy would have to overcome. It continued to be believed that an invasion of the United Kingdom would be "one of the most hazardous operations of war that can be attempted". All hinged on the question of whether the Germans could gain air superiority, this being thought most unlikely unless the Low Countries were seized first. It was expected that any invasion would be preceded by an attempt to neutralise the R.A.F., either by "extended operations against our first line

21. WO 166/1: op. cit., March 1940, Appendix I: Minutes of C.-in-C.'s Conference, 29 March 1940.

22. Lord Geddes Papers: BHLH Collection 1/311/116: Memoranda, Feb. 1940.

aircraft, operational aerodromes, reserves and aircraft industry" or by "a sudden and concentrated offensive against our first line fighter and bomber stations, immediately prior to the invasion". However, in the first case, the operation:

".... is one of great magnitude and our air forces have been deployed to meet it. It is probable that the enemy's losses would be so heavy that the intensity of his attacks would be reduced to negligible proportions before he came within reach of neutralising our air forces,"

while, in the second case, aiming at the complete temporary immobilisation of the R.A.F.'s fighter and bomber force:

".... the enemy could not attain a total success, and even a reduced bomber force could inflict heavy losses on so vulnerable a target as a sea-borne expedition." ²³.

It was also thought that German air action, over a prolonged period, would be unsuccessful in completely eliminating the Royal Navy from the North Sea, since "whatever success such air operations might achieve, we could still harry the German sea communications by light surface forces, mines and submarines", while the chances of a German convoy escaping detection and subsequent attack during its long passage was considered to be very low. Even though the combination of winter nights and low visibility might help the enemy:

".... it is difficult to envisage circumstances in which the enemy expedition would not be vulnerable to attack at sea at some stage of the operation, either by naval or air action. Unless our fighter strength had been drastically reduced by preliminary air attack, the enemy escorts would be liable to severe losses in the vicinity of our coast."

The success of the actual landings, too, would be dependent on the Germans' achieving air superiority. The use of paratroopers to seize aerodromes, ports or other landing places:

".... would be difficult without air superiority or complete surprise, and the organisation of such a project would be an immense undertaking. By day, such an operation would be hazardous in the extreme, by night, objectives would be difficult to identify.... Even if a success, few of the air landed troops could hope to survive."

23. WO 166/1: op. cit., Dec. 1939, Appendix 5: 'Julius Caesar' Plan, Amendment No. 2, 12 Dec. 1940.

Most difficult of all would be the disembarkation of the enemy seaborne force, a process that would occupy not less than seven hours, during which time the transports would be vulnerable to air attack as well as to land forces. It was considered that "complete surprise or air superiority is most improbable" and that "whatever local successes might be attained, the enemy's line of retreat would be threatened both from the air and sea." 24.

General Kirke continued to believe that only a landing on the coastline of Suffolk and East Norfolk, with its exposed ports and beaches, would give the Germans any real chance of success. His Amendment in December stated that:

"Navigational difficulties, the position of our own minefields and fixed defences indicate that the most practicable coast for attack lies between Yarmouth and Harwich, an area in which the port of Harwich only is accessible for transport. The direction of an expedition to an unexpected place cannot, however, be entirely ruled out, but distance eliminates any area north of the Tyne or south of Harwich."

All in all, there seemed little reason to alter the conclusion that invasion across the North Sea from North Germany would be bound to result in a costly German failure and would be "a desperate undertaking, which is unlikely to achieve success so long as our land and air forces remain in being and provided the necessary precautions are maintained effectively." 25. Indeed, by February 1940, General Kirke was sufficiently confident of the remoteness of the possibility of invasion to relax the minimum time of eight hours' notice required in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan to 24 hours. 26.

By the 3rd May, the response to an attempted German invasion or raid was still to be a mobile one, as set out in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan, but the means to carry it out had by now been substantially reduced. The 1st (Yeomanry) Cavalry Division had left for the Middle East in December and the 5th (Regular) Division had been sent to France in the same month to join the four other Regular Divisions already there. By early May, these five Regular infantry divisions in France had been joined by no less than five of the

24. *ibid.*

25. *ibid.*

26. WO 166/1: *op. cit.*, Feb. 1940, Appendix F: 'Julius Caesar' Plan, Amendment No. 10, 17 Feb. 1940.

best trained and equipped first line Territorial infantry divisions from Home Forces, the 48th (S. Midland), 50th (Northumbrian) and 51st (Highland) Divisions in January, and the 42nd (E. Lancs.) and 44th (Home Counties) Divisions early in April. The infantry and Royal Engineers of three of the second line Territorial divisions, the 12th (Eastern), 23rd (Northumbrian) and 46th (N. Midland and W. Riding) left in mid April for pioneer duties with the B.E.F.. What little artillery and heavy equipment they possessed was left in Britain at the disposal of Home Forces, but their departure meant that the divisions remaining in Britain were further stretched to provide adequate troops to guard vulnerable points and, if necessary, for internal security duties in co-operation with the Civil Authorities. April also saw the departure of two further first line Territorial divisions, the 49th (W. Riding) to Norway and the 53rd (Welsh) to Ulster, which was outside the C.-in-C., Home Forces' control, and of two regiments of the 1st Army Tank Brigade, with its 77 Matilda I and 23 invaluable new Matilda II heavy Infantry tanks, and 17 Vickers light tanks, to France. ²⁷.

These departures severely weakened Home Forces, though the arrival of the 1st Canadian Division in December 1939, bringing its own light equipment, was a very welcome addition. The relatively strong 1st Armoured Division, consisting of the 2nd (Light) and 3rd (Heavy) Armoured Brigades, had 121 A9, A10 and A13 Cruisers, 203 Vickers light tanks and eight 25 pdr. field guns, and, though earmarked for France, still remained available for the 'Julius Caesar' Plan on 3rd May. The 2nd Armoured Division had, up to January 1940, consisted of only the 1st Light Armoured Brigade, but in that month it received the addition of the 22nd Heavy Armoured Brigade. Each armoured brigade, theoretically, consisted of three regiments, with light and Cruiser tanks respectively, though the distinction between 'Light' and 'Heavy' armoured brigades was abolished in March 1940. However, by 3rd May, the 1st (Light) Armoured Brigade had a mere 31 machine-gun armed Vickers light tanks, compared with 77 in January, whereas 22nd (Heavy) Armoured Brigade "have no serviceable tanks, but have been issued with 525 rifles per regiment". ²⁸. There were also 12 armoured cars with 1st Derby Yeomanry, but the 2nd Armoured Division Support Group could only muster a mixed bag of 10 field guns and two 2 pdr. anti-tank guns and most of these had been left

27. WO 166/1: op. cit., Dec. 1939 - April 1940.

28. WO 166/1: op. cit., January 1940, Appendix J: 'Julius Caesar' Plan, Amendment No. 8, 24 Jan. 1940; and WO 166/1: op. cit., May 1940, Appendix A: 'Julius Caesar' Plan, Amendment No. 14, 3 May 1940.

by the 12th Division, which had been sent to France without any of its artillery. (See Appendices 3 and 4.) Indeed, so slow was the production of tanks in Britain during the winter and spring of 1939-40, that the H.Q. of the 3rd Armoured Division, set up in September 1939, was disbanded in December of that year, while the 21st, 23rd and 24th Army Tank Brigades, also formed in September 1939, had still not received any serviceable tanks by the beginning of May!

Thus, by the 3rd May, General Kirke had only eight weak or inexperienced divisions, plus elements of two more, available to carry out the 'Julius Caesar' Plan. (See Appendix 4 and Map 4.) Of these divisions, one was earmarked for despatch overseas at short notice, while four others were second line Territorial divisions. Six divisions, and part of two others, were spread along the East Coast ready to deal immediately with any landing in their area. In Scottish Command two second line Territorial divisions were deployed, the 9th (Scottish) north of the Forth, and elements of the 15th (Scottish) near the Border. In Northern Command the first line Territorial 54th (East Anglian) Division on Tyneside and Teeside had been placed temporarily in H.Q. Reserve, so as to be able to go to the aid of either Scottish Command or Northern Command, until the second line 66th (Lancs. and Border) Division could be moved from the Manchester area into Yorkshire to fill the gap left by 49th Division's departure in April. The partly trained and equipped 2nd Armoured Division still covered the East Riding of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. In the vulnerable Eastern Command, the coast-line in early May was covered by only three Territorial divisions, the second line 18th (East Anglian) and the first line 55th (W. Lancs.) Divisions guarding East Anglia, and the 1st London Division (first line) which was situated in Kent and Sussex. Eastern Command had also been strengthened by a brigade group of the 2nd London Division, extra artillery, and the 20th Infantry Brigade, which was placed in Eastern Command Reserve at Aldershot. The H.Q. Reserve, besides the 54th Division in Northern Command, now consisted of the 1st Canadian Division at Aldershot and, until its departure to France in mid May, the relatively powerful 1st Armoured Division in Dorset. These two divisions were placed so as to go to the aid of Eastern Command if required.²⁹ Not involved in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan were a further three Territorial divisions training in the West Country, of which two were first line and one second line, and another four second line divisions and part of a fifth, which were situated near main

29. WO 166/1: op. cit., May 1940, Appendix A: 'Julius Caesar' Plan, Amendment No. 14, 3 May 1940.

population centres. These last were partly engaged in training, but were so placed so as to provide aid to the civil powers in an emergency, to provide guards for a myriad of vulnerable points and to perform other kindred tasks.

General Kirke's dispositions to meet what he believed were the unlikely circumstances of invasion from North Germany, were sound enough and they reflected his view that East Anglia was the most vulnerable area. However, the weakness of the 'Julius Caesar' Plan lay in the fact that the forces under his command at the beginning of May had been severely weakened by departures overseas and his troops were consequently spread very thinly on the ground. They were also largely semi-trained, relatively immobile and lacking in all types of heavy equipment, especially artillery and anti-tank guns. Home Forces continued to be starved of troops and equipment, as the main effort was directed to reinforcing the B.E.F. and to bringing it up to establishment. There simply were not enough trained troops or equipment available to provide both a strong force at home and a strong B.E.F., even after no less than eight months of war. The chickens of the period of disarmament and unpreparedness during the inter-war years were truly coming home to roost.

The provision of enough transport for the formations and units employed in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan continued to give much cause for concern and remained a major problem throughout the spring of 1940. Most transport still had to be provided by voluntary hiring as late as May 1940 and even this measure still left formations well short of their war establishment. An amendment to the 'Julius Caesar' Plan in March gave instructions that:

".... sufficient first line transport will be hired to bring units up to 50% of their War Establishment, except that:-

- (i) Gun-towing vehicles will be provided on a scale of one gun-towing vehicle per serviceable 18 pdr., 25 pdr. or 4.5" howitzer in possession, up to a limit of 24 guns per division.
- (ii) Before hiring is resorted to, every use will be made of War Department transport in possession of units of formations in the J.C. Plan (if any) who are not earmarked for any anti-invasion role."

Both second line transport and troop-carrying transport were to be earmarked, but only hired when the emergency arose. ^{30.}

30. WO 166/1: op. cit., March 1940, Appendix D: 'Julius Caesar' Plan, Amendment No. 11, 19 March 1940.

The transport situation was little better in May. At a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff on 7th May, General Kirke pointed out that "sufficient first line transport was held by all units concerned in home defence for the conveyance of one company per battalion" only, and though "transport for the remainder was earmarked, and could be assembled fairly quickly", this was leading to costly hiring problems for exercises, and without hiring transport the vital exercises to practise the movements required under the defence schemes could not be carried out. Not only this, but the fact that exercises were actually taking place was given away and civilian drivers might have to be compelled, "by physical force, if necessary," to stay with their vehicles in an emergency. ³¹.

Even more worrying was the lack of heavy equipment among the 'Julius Caesar' divisions. (See Appendices 3 and 4.) The artillery of the 9th, 15th, 54th and 66th Divisions, for example, consisted of only 24 guns apiece, on 3rd May, out of a theoretical War Establishment of 72; while the 18th, 55th, 1st London and 2nd London Divisions in the vital Eastern Command area had a mere 16 guns each. The 1st Canadian Division had a mere 12 guns and the two armoured divisions even less. The artillery shortage would have been even worse had the artillery of the three Territorial divisions, which had departed to France for works service, not been left in Britain at the disposal of Home Forces. Of the divisional totals generally 50% were 4.5" howitzers, 25% the equally obsolete 18 pdrs., and only 25% were the modern 25 pdr. field-gun howitzers or the stop-gap 18/25 pdrs.. Even so, the supply of 25 pdrs. or 18/25 pdrs. to Home Forces was gradually coming forward, since the 'Julius Caesar' divisions now disposed of a grand total of 82 25 pdrs., compared with a mere 25 on 24th January 1940. ³².

Ammunition, too, was in very short supply for Home Forces. As late as 25th May, instructions were given that:

"With regard to the provision of artillery ammunition, Commands are requested to note that the position is that ammunition cannot be allotted except for such guns as are included in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan." ³³.

31. CAB 79/4: COS 114th(40):3, 7 May 1940.

32. WO 166/1: op. cit., January 1940, Appendix J: 'Julius Caesar' Plan, Amendment No. 8, 24 Jan. 1940; and WO 166/1: op. cit., May 1940, Appendix A: 'Julius Caesar' Plan, Amendment No. 14, 3 May 1940.

33. WO 166/1: op. cit., May 1940, Appendix G: 'Julius Caesar' Plan, Amendment No. 19, 25 May 1940.

The Chronic shortage of anti-tank guns was more worrying still. (See Appendices 3 and 4.) On 3rd May, the grand total of 2 pdr. anti-tank guns with the 'Julius Caesar' formations had risen from 22 on 24th January to only 30. This represented an alarming deficiency for Home Forces, if it is considered that the War Establishment should have been 48 for each division, more than all the 'Julius Caesar' Plan formations combined could put together! 34.

The fixed defences, too, at the nineteen ports classified as Category A were still inadequate by early May and, in spite of some small improvements since the autumn, they generally still fell short of the approved scales, the Authorities taking confidence only in the fact that they were there and would, with luck, never be used. Most fixed defences were armed with the standard pre-First World War medium range 9.2" and 6" guns emplaced in open pits. There was little modern accommodation, they were manned by Territorials, they were all sited to fire out to sea, they mainly lacked any form of landward defences against land attack from the rear, and there was a grave shortage of short-range weapons to deal with fast surface raiders and of vital searchlight and communications equipment. 35.

Another problem General Kirke had to cope with during the winter and spring of 1939-40 was the constant loss of the best trained and equipped formations that formed the H.Q. Reserve for the 'Julius Caesar' Plan. General Kirke still had only relatively limited powers over the troops and formations in the United Kingdom, which were placed under his command primarily for the purposes of training. However, as formations were trained, they were removed from his command and placed under the War Office's direct operational command as a normal step in moving them abroad. These formations were usually those that formed General Kirke's H.Q. Reserve, and he, therefore, had a continuous struggle to find adequate formations to plug the gaps in the 'Julius Caesar' Plan. Since he did not expect to have to command Home Forces in battle, General Kirke accepted the removals by the War Office of his H.Q. Reserve. He was, however, often privately frustrated by the sometimes rather high-handed actions of the War Office.

34. WO 166/1: op. cit., May 1940, Appendix A: 'Julius Caesar' Plan, Amendment No. 14, 3 May 1940.

35. Collier, Basil: op. cit., pp. 97-98.

General Kirke's original G.H.Q. Reserve for 'Julius Caesar' in November 1939 had consisted of the 1st Armoured Division in East Anglia, the 48th (S. Midland) Division in the Hungerford area and the 51st (Highland) Division at Aldershot. Both these latter divisions left for France in January 1940 and were replaced in the Plan from 24th January by two more first line Territorial divisions, the 55th (W. Lancs.) in the Charnwood Forest area of Leicestershire and the 42nd (E. Lancs.), which was brought down to the Swindon area from Northumberland. (See Appendix 3 and Map 2.) These two divisions, together with 1st Armoured Division, which was moved to the Blandford area of Dorset late in January, remained in H.Q. Reserve until the end of March. (See Map 3.) However, the 42nd was ordered to depart overseas early in April, and General Kirke had to make further adjustments. At first, he planned to bring 49th (W. Riding) Division from Northern Command to the Swindon area to replace the 42nd Division, but this could not be done until the end of April. General Kirke allowed for this delay by making use of the recently arrived 1st Canadian Division at Aldershot:

"This will produce a period of some weeks when no division in the Swindon area will be available for the 'J.C.' Plan. As 1st Canadian Division, which was not previously included in the 'J.C.' Plan, has now been incorporated as a further H.Q. Reserve division with effect from 1st April, this position is accepted." 36.

However, just three days later, H.Q. Home Forces received a rather terse preparatory order from the War Office that 49th Division "may be required to proceed overseas early" and was "placed under War Office control forthwith". 1st Canadian Division had, therefore, to remain in H.Q. Reserve. 37.

In the middle of April, 55th Division ceased to be in H.Q. Reserve when it was moved to the Essex coastline and three 'labour' divisions departed overseas. General Kirke, therefore, designated the 54th (East Anglian) Division, now in the Alnwick area of Northumberland, as a H.Q. Reserve until another division could be suitably positioned in the Midlands. The 54th was also well situated to guard against a possible threat from the Germans now in Norway. 38. (See Map 4.) Then, on 28th April, H.Q. Home Forces received

36. WO 166/1: op. cit., March 1940, Appendix H: 'Julius Caesar' Plan: H.Q. Reserves, 29 March 1940.

37. WO 166/1: op. cit., April 1940.

38. WO 166/1: op. cit., April 1940, Appendix C: Weekly Report of the C.-in-C., Home Forces, 20 April 1940.

preparatory orders from the War Office that 15th (Scottish) Division may be required to move from the Borders to the Swindon/Newbury area. This move, however, would leave only a single division in Scotland for Home Defence. General Kirke was by now becoming understandably annoyed at the constant interference in his dispositions by the War Office and was especially peeved at their high-handed attitude. On 4th May, the same day that preparatory orders were received by Home Forces for 1st Armoured Division to move overseas "about 12th May", General Kirke complained to the Permanent Under Secretary of State for War:

".... although I received a warning order that the 15th Division should be prepared to move to the Swindon area at 48 hours' notice, it appears that this move is now taking place without any further intimation being given to me, in spite of the fact that this Division has hitherto had an important defence role.

It is essential I should be kept fully informed of all War Office decisions affecting divisions included in the Anti-Invasion plan." 39.

General Kirke was to have further trouble with the War Office on this subject later in the month.

All in all, therefore, there were many loopholes in the Plan. The military historian, Captain B. H. Liddell Hart commented on 6th May:

".... the military authorities say that they cannot oppose the actual landing, and will need time to concentrate troops to meet it. They do not seem to have grasped the tempo of modern war." 40.

* * *

Despite the weakness of Home Forces in April and early May, the principles of the 'Julius Caesar' Plan were still expected to give adequate defence against German land-based forces, provided that the Channel coast remained in friendly or neutral hands. It was believed that even the weak divisions at home would suffice to mop up airborne landings and defeat any elements of a large raiding force that survived the long sea crossing.

39. WO 166/1: op. cit., May 1940, Appendix B: Weekly Report of the C.-in-C., Home Forces, 4 May 1940.

40. Liddell Hart Papers: 11/1940/31: Notes for History, 6 May 1940.

However, the other major assumption that, despite the doubts raised in October 1939, the Royal Navy and R.A.F., backed up by the coastal defences, would virtually preclude a landing by seaborne troops alone, was severely jolted by the German invasion of Norway which began on 9th April. The British had for many years taken the control of the North Sea for granted and had presumed that the might of British Naval power would present almost insuperable problems to an aggressor, but in their invasion of Norway the Germans showed they could transport and land large numbers of troops by sea in the teeth of the Royal Navy and R.A.F. successfully and regardless of losses to shipping and their surface fleet.⁴¹ This moral victory, which made the North Sea and the Navy seem far less formidable barriers, came as a rude shock to Britain, though it seemed to take several weeks more for its full implications to become generally realized.

In the initial assault and the subsequent Norwegian campaign, the British also noted the German use of airlanding troops, combined with seaborne landings, to capture ports, the use of a large 'fifth column', the Germans' speed in exploiting confusion, the efficient air cover provided by the Luftwaffe which often operated from newly captured airfields, and the enemy's readiness to use surprise, run immense risks and to flout all the sound laws of strategy as taught at Greenwich and Camberley. Not only this, but the increased length of the enemy-occupied coastline northwards provided an excellent base for heavy air attack by bombers on both the Royal Navy in the North Sea and on its naval bases on the East Coast or at Scapa Flow, as well as an improved starting point for seaborne invasion or raids.⁴² Consequently, on 15th April, General Kirke recommended revision of the scale of attack on the United Kingdom "in the light of our Norwegian experiences."⁴³

Even so, the importance of the lessons learned from the fall of Norway and their influence on British anti-invasion thinking, though important, must not be over-emphasized, since it was realized that the invasion of the United Kingdom would be an entirely different kettle of fish. Norway's vast and broken coastline, small population and armed forces, well organised

41. Collier, Basil: op. cit., pp. 97-100, H.M.S.O., London, 1957.

42. CAB 80/10: COS(40)332: Annexe 1, 10 May 1940.

43. Kirke Papers: op. cit.

'fifth column' and almost total German command of both the short sea approaches and of the air, meant the country was especially vulnerable to invasion and it was quite impossible to prevent the landings. The main lesson for the British was "not being ready". 44.

Captain B. H. Liddell Hart considered that, even with the fall of Denmark and Norway, an invasion of the United Kingdom by sea, preceded or accompanied by an air offensive on the Fleet and R.A.F., was most unlikely:

"As regards an invasion of this country it seemed rather an extreme assumption that, even if the Fleet could be temporarily paralysed, a large enough proportion of our air force could be caught napping, in view of our warning system. Unless such an air surprise was a complete success, the landing forces would be in a similar position to that of our landing forces in Norway - dominated by the advantage which a shore-based air force enjoys." 45.

The topic of invasion of the United Kingdom was absent from the agenda of the War Cabinet until 30th April, even though the Germans had moved into Norway as early as the 9th April. On the previous day, the 29th April, the Military Co-ordination Committee, meeting at No. 10 Downing Street under the chairmanship of Neville Chamberlain, had touched on the question of invasion, which had arisen out of discussion on operations in Norway. The Committee had generally agreed that:

".... although large-scale invasion in the face of powerful air forces was a very difficult operation, the putting ashore by the Germans of a small and well organised party, perhaps preceded by troops landed from the air, might be carried out in this country. our aerodromes were very lightly defended and there was a shortage of trained and equipped troops in this country. On the other hand, there were excellent roads in every part of the country and there was much artillery, all of which was mechanised."

The Committee had instructed the Chiefs of Staff to "re-examine the existing plans for the defence of the United Kingdom against invasion" and, in view of the shortage of trained troops, Oliver Stanley, Secretary of State for War, had been invited to consider the advisability of bringing the remainder the 5th Division back from France and whether any changes should be made in

44. Interviews with Lt.Col. J. Nigel St. G. Kirke, 11 August 1981; and with Lt.Gen. Sir William G. H. Pike, 18 August 1981.

45. Liddell Hart Papers: 11/1940/31: Notes for History, 6 May 1940.

present arrangements for despatching the IV Corps (consisting of 43rd (Wessex), 52nd (Lowland) and 1st Canadian Divisions) to France early in June. ^{46.}

At the War Cabinet meeting on 30th April, Oliver Stanley explained that the small number of fully-trained troops in the United Kingdom was due to the fact that the War Cabinet had decided that the newly formed divisions should be sent to France as early as possible. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, who at the Co-ordination meeting had pressed for the reinforcement and retention of troops to guard the United Kingdom, took the opportunity to raise another of his pet proposals, that the weak forces in Britain should be supplemented by regular battalions withdrawn from India, to be replaced by Territorial battalions sent out from the homeland. At the same meeting, Lord Hankey, Minister Without Portfolio, drew attention to the lessons to be learned from the ruses adopted by Germany in their attack on Norway, such as the sending of false messages, the cutting of telephone wires and the sending of transport ships quite openly into ports, and the importance of devising suitable safeguards to these strategies. The Chiefs of Staff were invited to take all these factors into account in their re-appraisal of the defence plans. ^{47.}

On the same day, there arrived a telegram from the British Ambassador in Ankara, Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, the contents of which appeared somewhat suspicious. The Ambassador reported that:

".... at a recent meeting in Budapest of Hungarian Military Attachés, a statement had been made that the Germans were preparing a vast number of aircraft for dive-bombing and ground attack, and a large number of small submarines.... With these the Germans intended to make a great combined attack on the Home Fleet; after this attack they intended to land 25,000 men in England." ^{48.}

Intelligence, meanwhile, reported that a number of unidentified ships had been observed off the coast of the Netherlands. During discussion of these reports at the War Cabinet meeting on 1st May, Churchill again pressed for the reinforcement of Home Forces, if necessary from the B.E.F. in France.

46. CAB 83/3: MC 36th(40):2, 29 April 1940.

47. CAB 65/6: WM 108th(40):4, 30 April 1940.

48. Telegram No. 341 D.I.P.P., from Ankara, 30 April 1940.

More than ever, he felt that "we should have at least one highly trained division in this country available to meet a German landing". Oliver Stanley, agreeing with Churchill's view, said that he had already taken preliminary steps to recall the rest of the 5th Division (its 15th Brigade was currently being extracted from Norway) and that final orders would be issued on the following day. 49.

However, at the Chiefs of Staff meeting on the morning of 3rd May, General Sir Edmund Ironside, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, said that for the moment the 5th Division, presently in War Office reserve in the Amiens area, was to remain in France "where it was, well situated strategically for meeting an attack on the Western Front or against the United Kingdom". 50. The reason for the change of plan had been outraged objections from the Headquarters of the B.E.F., where it was believed that the German assault on the West would shortly begin. Lieutenant-General Sir Henry R. Pownall, Chief of the General Staff to the B.E.F., recalled, with some relief, the next day:

"I succeeded in getting the removal of 5th Division from France stopped or at least postponed.... But at present there is a Home Defence flap on, started by Winston, and the Secretary of State, who is not too courageous a man, is being criticised at the alleged lack of trained troops in this country." 51.

At the same meeting of the Chiefs of Staff on 3rd May, the Air Staff emphasized the danger, especially to East Anglia, of parachute landings, possibly in considerable numbers rather than the small parties hitherto expected. Plans in some detail were being worked out to cover possible German landings at Harwich and Yarmouth, and, while the police in East Anglia would not be armed, there was to be close liaison between them and the military authorities, Regional Commissioner for Cambridge and the Observer Corps, while local arrangements were felt necessary to prevent, by removal or destruction, supplies falling into the hands of enemy raiding parties. The Committee noted that the C.-in-C., Home Forces, was overhauling his defence scheme and also that the Joint Planning Committee was

49. CAB 65/7: WM 109th(40):9; and CAB 65/13: WM 109th(40):9, 1 May 1940.

50. CAB 79/4: COS 108th(40):4, 3 May 1940.

51. Diaries of Lt.Gen. Sir Henry R. Pownall, 4 May 1940.

revising the Chiefs of Staff's November 1939 appreciation of seaborne and airborne attack on the United Kingdom, in the light of recent experience. ^{52.}

On 3rd May, General Ironside had reassured the Chiefs of Staff that, although the 5th Division would remain in France, the 1st Armoured Division in Dorset, now consisting of the 2nd and 20th Light Armoured Brigades, and the 3rd Heavy Armoured Brigade, could be moved very rapidly to any threatened point to aid the troops in Eastern or Northern Command. ^{53.} Two days later, Ironside announced to the C.O.S. Committee that orders had been issued on the 4th May for the despatch of 1st Armoured Division to France, though the move overseas was not to be until "about 12th May". In the event, this was to be too late to play an effective role in the May operations. This departure would severely weaken Home Forces, since the Division had been earmarked for a very important anti-invasion role. However, General Ironside put the minds of the Committee at rest by assuring them that its place would be taken by certain elements of IV Corps and that General Kirke had been informed of the impending move and would make the necessary alterations in his defence scheme. ^{54.}

General Kirke himself accepted, and indeed supported, the move of 1st Armoured Division to France. He continued to believe, in early May, that the emphasis of British military effort should be on building up the B.E.F.. He maintained his view that the stronger the Allied forces were on the Continent the stronger the forces the Germans would have to deploy against them and, consequently, the smaller would be the force that the Germans could possibly bring to bear against the weakened formations in the United Kingdom. On the 2nd May he had been warned that the Cabinet was anxious about invasion, and four days later he went to see the Secretary of State about Home Defence. He later recalled of their talk:

"I opposed keeping back the Armoured Division on the grounds that the decisive point was in the defence of Holland, Belgium and France, and that, so long as we maintained our position there, the invasion of Great Britain would not arise." ^{55.}

52. CAB 79/4: COS 108th(40):4, 3 May 1940.

53. *ibid.*

54. CAB 79/4: COS 111th(40):6, 5 May 1940.

55. Kirke Papers: Home Defence File: Notes left by General Sir Walter Kirke, 1939-1940.

On 7th May the Chiefs of Staff Committee, with General Kirke and General Sir Hugh Elles, from the Ministry of Home Security, present, met to discuss the dangers of invasion. General Kirke was first invited to outline his measures to guard against the three expected forms of attack. In the case of widespread air bombardment, some troops were still to be held near to large centres of population, so as "something would be immediately available to support the civil power in preventing confusion and restoring the local situation". In the case of the second form of attack, airborne attack on aerodromes, General Kirke said that on the more likely aerodromes there were military guards, composed of two platoons of Home Defence troops, to prevent sabotage and also to repel the enemy's first landing until reinforced. These would be backed up by anti-aircraft troops with light automatics and those R.A.F. personnel who were armed with rifles. Mobile detachments of the Field Army were organised "to provide a first reinforcement to any aerodrome attacked, their duty being to picket the area occupied by the enemy until the arrival of stronger forces". To guard against the third possibility, that of airborne attack combined with seaborne attack, General Kirke explained that the principles of the 'Julius Caesar' Plan, centring round the premise that the enemy would try to capture an East Coast port so as to enable the landing of heavy stores, were still to stand essentially unchanged. The first line of defence were the fixed defences, and troops of the field army were held in the vicinity of each port.⁵⁶ Explaining the dispositions of the various divisions available for Home Defence to the Committee, he stressed that the Plan "depended on quick counter-attack and therefore on mobility", though to achieve this it "required the organisation of the Divisional R.A.S.C. and Signals for certain second-line divisions".⁵⁷

Sir Hugh Elles, explaining the main features of the regional organisation of civil defence, pointed out that, whereas previously it had been thought that only raids might occur between the Tyne and the Thames, now through the loss of the Norwegian coast, the Chiefs of Staff's latest appreciation had extended the possibility of raids to the North of Scotland and the new idea of invasion, rather than raids, between The Wash and as

56. CAB 79/4: COS 114th(40):3, 7 May 1940.

57. Kirke Papers: op. cit.

far as Newhaven had been added to the picture. This would mean a revision of the evacuation policy and the arrangements thought out to deal with evacuees from East Coast ports.⁵⁸

The Chiefs of Staff then went on to discuss a wide range of pressing matters of home defence, that would be urgently considered by the War Office. These included the strengthening of General Kirke's staff, the importance of a good warning system and duplicated methods of communication to counter confusion created by air bombing and 'fifth column' activity, the continuing transport problem, the necessity of not tying up troops of the Field Army in the guarding of vulnerable points, the grouping of holding battalions formed to take the place of divisions ordered abroad, the vulnerability of coast defence batteries to landward attack and machine gunning from the air, the strengthening of the Shetland garrison, the carrying out of anti-invasion exercises and the preparation of demolition schemes in suitable areas, especially at ports. General Kirke said that, 'while some consideration had now been given to the demolition of cranes and other facilities at a port which the enemy was attempting to seize, there were as yet no plans for schemes to isolate enemy detachments that might land, since he was confident that his troops "could prevent the advance of any enemy force which could land on an open beach".⁵⁹ Two days later, Commands were ordered "to consider preparing bridges for demolition, road blocks, etc.", however, even on the eve of the opening of the German offensive on the West, there was no real sense of urgency, since Headquarters, Home Forces, instructed that "reports are required with estimates of cost".⁶⁰

The Chiefs of Staff Committee's re-examination of the problems posed by seaborne and airborne attack on the United Kingdom, to incorporate the lessons and consequences of the fall of Norway, was continued in discussion over the next few days and resulted in the final approval, on 10th May, of their report on the subject.⁶¹ The Chiefs of Staff concluded that the possibility of seaborne or airborne raids had extended northwards to the Shetlands, though they were "more likely to be carried out as diversions,

58. CAB 79/4: COS 114th(40):3, 7 May 1940.

59. *ibid.*

60. WO 166/1: *op. cit.*, May 1940.

61. CAB 79/4: COS 120th(40):1, 10 May 1940.

simultaneously with an intensive air attack or invasion, rather than as isolated operations in themselves". They might be aimed at destroying isolated points of particular military importance, such as R.D.F. stations or vital communications centres, and would probably be aided by a 'fifth column'. As for invasion, the Chiefs of Staff considered that there was no reason to revise their November 1939 conclusion that invasion was not a serious danger "so long as our naval and air forces remain in being and provided the necessary precautions are maintained effectively". They believed that:

"The possibility of invasion is conditional upon the Germans having gained a high degree of air superiority. For this reason the first stage is likely to be an attack upon our air forces and their maintenance organisation."

Air superiority was regarded as:

".... the crux of the problem since, if the Germans succeeded in neutralizing our air forces, it might be impossible for our naval forces to prevent the establishment and maintenance of considerable German forces in this country."

It was also thought that Germany could not achieve this air superiority without the preliminary occupation of Holland. ⁶².

The Chiefs of Staff believed that seaborne invasion was likely to be preceded by a heavy scale of air attack on our naval forces, ports and R.A.F. stations, first line air strength, reserves, maintenance organisation and air industry. Only when he had largely achieved these aims, would the enemy be expected to proceed to the subsequent stages of a plan of invasion.

If the Germans were to decide to attempt a landing, "they are likely to choose those places at which the full weight of their short-range bombers and fighters could be brought to bear". These same places incorporated the shortest sea routes and were "within striking distance of the most vital area in the country - London". ⁶³. The area most vulnerable to

62. CAB 80/10: COS 332(40); also WP 153(40), 10 May 1940.

63. *ibid.*

a landing was, therefore, between The Wash and Folkestone, not merely East Anglia, as previously thought. The Thames estuary was difficult to approach and was strongly defended, while a landing appeared much less likely on the South than on the East Coast, because of the longer sea passage from the German or Dutch ports and the fact that "the passage of the Strait of Dover with an expedition of any size would be a most hazardous undertaking and appeared to be an unlikely operation".⁶⁴ Initial landings at the defended ports of Yarmouth, Harwich and Dover were unlikely, but "there are numerous beaches on the east and south-east coasts which are suitable for landings". It was felt possible that the enemy might make a landing in Scotland, possibly in the Shetlands, or even on the north-east coast, before the main attack, as a diversion.⁶⁵

Air action was also expected to be used in direct support of both the enemy's airborne and seaborne expeditions "to cover their approach, assist the landings, isolate the areas where footholds had been obtained and to attempt to block the movements of defending forces". The estimated total of German parachute troops had by now risen to 5,000, though their expected method of employment, to seize landing grounds adjacent to ports, so that perhaps 11,000 more troops in transport aircraft might land, remained the same. However, now the initial seaborne landings were believed to be on beaches on which vehicles could be put ashore in the vicinity of ports, rather than directly at ports. The forces so landed, supported by air bombardment and helped by 'fifth column' activities, would then "try to establish and maintain enough forces to extend their control over sufficient ports and harbours to ensure adequate communications for their main invading forces".⁶⁶

Although a warning of possible enemy intentions might be provided by the inception of the enemy's air offensive, the only positive indication of an attempt to invade was expected to be the concentration of ships and troops. The actual date of sailing and the point or points of attack would remain in doubt until the last moment. German minelaying and minesweeping

64. CAB 79/4: COS 115th(40):4, 7 May 1940.

65. CAB 80/10: COS 332(40); and WP 153(40), 10 May 1940.

66. *ibid.*

might provide some indication of events to come, while there is "no doubt that 'fifth column' activities will play a very dangerous and important part in any operation the enemy may undertake against this country". All in all, the Chiefs of Staff remained firm in their view that:

"The dispatch of a large-scale expedition against this country while our naval and air forces are in being, is not, in our opinion, a practicable operation of war and would not be attempted." 67.

This was the Chiefs of Staff's line of thinking as regards the German invasion of the United Kingdom on the eve of the opening of the long awaited enemy offensive on the Western Front. The rapid pace of events over the next few weeks was to lead to a transformation of the thinking behind their appreciation, which would render it quickly obsolete and would also set in motion a drastic revision of General Kirke's 'Julius Caesar' Plan.

67. *ibid.*

CHAPTER 4: THE MAY PANIC

On the 10th May the German assault on the Low Countries and France began. Airborne forces, some in disguise, helped effectively to overwhelm Holland in 18 hours and subdue the Belgian frontier defences. On 13th May the full force of the Blitzkrieg struck when the Germans crossed the Meuse and punched an enormous breach through the front of the French 9th Army. On the 16th, the Allied armies in Belgium began their long withdrawal and four days later the spearhead of the German armour had reached the coast at Abbeville. By the morning of the 28th May the Belgian forces, fought to exhaustion on the left flank of the British army, had surrendered and the B.E.F., together with the French 1st Army and parts of the French 7th Army, was trapped in a rapidly shrinking pocket around Dunkirk. Operation 'Dynamo', full-scale evacuation by sea, had already begun.

It was against this fast moving background of the triumph of a new dynamic form of warfare, using tanks, aircraft, mechanised infantry and airborne troops in combination, over the outmoded defensive principles that produced the Maginot Line, that the re-examination of the plans for the defence of the United Kingdom on land, set in motion by the invasion of Norway, reached the proportions of a drastic re-assessment. During the next few weeks the War Cabinet met every day, and sometimes twice a day, to consider the deteriorating situation in the Low Countries and France, and emergency measures to guard against invasion were discussed at almost every meeting from this time onwards. The belief in the imminence of an invasion attempt was only temporarily interrupted by events on the Continent which in their turn suggested ingenious new methods which the Germans might use - parachute landings, aircraft landing in open spaces, 'fifth column' activities, raids by motor-boats and amphibious tanks. All these received the attention of the War Cabinet, as well as that of the Chiefs of Staff's Committee.

The opening of the German offensive on the West on 10th May happened to coincide with long overdue changes in the political direction of the country, which had been caused by the political debate following the Norwegian debacle. Neville Chamberlain and his Cabinet submitted their resignations late that afternoon and a Coalition Government under Winston Churchill was formed, heralding a more positive and dynamic attitude to the invasion question, as well as to the whole conduct of the war in general.

Churchill set up the Defence Committee, headed by himself as Minister of Defence, while the Chiefs of Staff formed the Home Defence Executive to supervise the drastic overhaul of measures for defence. Consisting of representatives of the Admiralty, Air Ministry, operational staff of the Ministry of Home Security and the chief Home Commands of the R.A.F., under the chairmanship of the C.-in-C. Home Forces, it allowed General Kirke to ensure that plans and actions to deal with airborne and seaborne attacks were fully co-ordinated.

The Executive, while remaining individually responsible to their own ministries, would be jointly responsible to the Chiefs of Staff's Committee and its province was extended to almost every aspect of defence against invasion or raids, including civil defence, so as to prepare the population of the country for the expected shock. Among the many aspects of the problem the Executive was shortly to consider was the obtaining and issuing of information to all authorities; air and naval reconnaissance of the areas in greatest danger of attack; mine-laying policy; an effective warning system; protection of aerodromes; naval, air, anti-aircraft and troop dispositions; defence at ports and landing places; security of communications; preparation of demolition plans; evacuation plans for casualties and the civil population; countering 'fifth column' activities; and how best to educate the civilian population to co-operate with the civil and military defence plans both before and during operations. ¹.

General Kirke now at last had a measure of control over all of the aspects of anti-invasion planning and preparations, not just the military, and he could make his influence felt on Civil Defence and the other services. He regarded the formation of the Home Defence Executive as "a great advance". ².

A cloud of rumour and exaggerated or false reports, stirred up by the swift German advance, flowed into the United Kingdom over the next few days, causing consternation in all high places, not least at Headquarters, Home Forces, May 10th saw a flurry of activity take place at this Headquarters.

1. CAB 66/7: WP 153(40); and COS 332(40), Annex D, 10 May 1940.

2. Kirke Papers: Home Defence File. Notes left by General Sir Walter Kirke, 1939-1940.

The day's activities, however, provide an illustration of just how unprepared Home Forces were. At 8.56 a.m. the codeword 'Julius', signifying that "there are indications that an attack is contemplated", was issued by General Kirke to Home Forces, and the coastal defences were put at immediate readiness, as was the Civil Defence organisation later in the day, following instructions from the Minister for Home Security. Transport, previously earmarked for hiring at short notice for the 'Julius Caesar' Plan, was to be taken up forthwith, so as to complete the first and second line transport up to establishment. These vehicles, however, consisted of a hotch-potch of civilian vehicles - bakers' vans, grocers' vans, meat merchants' vans, builders' lorries, coal carriers, buses, coaches - at first often used in their civilian livery and with the name of the business or company still painted on. Aldershot Command, complaining that the "taking up of transport would mean the cessation of omnibus services", were tersely instructed to "proceed with impressment". At 11.05 a.m. Headquarters, Home Forces, issued orders to Eastern Command for "road blocks at ports to be completed immediately"; and at 2.15 p.m. a request to the War Office to move the second-line 45th (West Country) Division from Exeter to cover the virtually unguarded Sussex Coast was approved and the necessary movement orders were issued.³

The chief fear prevalent during the chaotic May days, however, was that of German parachutists and air landing troops, a fear initiated by their use in Norway and now redoubled by their spectacular successes in Holland and Belgium. About noon on the 10th, an urgent message from the Air Ministry was circulated to all Commands and repeated to the Admiralty, War Office and Ministry of Home Security, stating that:

"Information from Norway shows that German parachute troops, when descending, hold their arms above their heads as if surrendering. The parachutist, however, holds a grenade in each hand. To counter this strategy, parachutists, if they exceed six in number, are to be treated as hostile and if possible shot in the air. The largest crew carried in any British bomber is six persons." 4.

The message naturally turned attention to the possibility that volunteers might be enrolled to help deal with this danger. Home Forces had already given instructions at 7.23 p.m. on the 10th May that "Germans (parachutists), clad in British uniform, will be dealt with ruthlessly".

3. WO 166/1: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, G.H.Q. Home Forces, May 1940.

4. Graves, Charles: The Home Guard of Britain, p. 10. Hutchinson, London, 1943.

Rumours of parachute landings abounded over the next few days, some of them sounding almost farcical in retrospect. At 1.20 a.m. on 11th May, there came a telephone message from the War Office to Headquarters, Home Forces, saying that:

"Admiralty considers attack on Southend Pier a possibility. Information had been received from an anonymous Nazi agent, who displayed strong anti-Nazi feelings."

Headquarters, Home Forces, recorded in their War Diary the following day:

"Numerous reports of parachutists dropping have been received; orders issued that no despatch of troops to be undertaken until verification obtained from Fighter Command through Command H.Q. concerned." 5.

On 11th May, General Kirke attended a meeting at the War Office under the outgoing Secretary of State for War, Oliver Stanley, at which General Sir John Dill, the Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Robert Gordon-Finlayson, the Adjutant General, and Sir Hugh Elles for the Ministry of Home Security, were present, to discuss the possibility of forming some kind of local defence organisation. The idea was not new and had its origins in the Volunteer Training Corps of the Great War. As early in the present war as 7th October 1939, Winston Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, pressing for the organisation of the Home Front in support of the war effort, had written to the Home Secretary:

"Then what about all these people of middle age, many of whom served in the last war, who are full of vigour and experience, and who are being told by tens of thousands that they are not wanted, and that there is nothing for them except to register at the local Labour Exchange? Surely this is very foolish. Why do we not form a Home Guard of half a million men over forty (if they like to volunteer), and put all our elderly stars at the head and in the structure of these new formations? Let these five hundred thousand men come along and push the young and active out of all the home billets. If uniforms are lacking, a brassard would suffice, and I am assured there are plenty of rifles at any rate. I thought from what you said to me the other day that you liked this idea. If so, let us make it work." 6.

No attempt, however, was made to develop this idea, let alone put it into practice, until the following month, when the raising of unofficial

5. WO 166/1: op. cit., May 1940.

6. Churchill, W. S.: Vol. I, The Gathering Storm, p. 439. Cassell, London, 1948.

local civilian volunteer units during the first invasion scare caused attention to be drawn towards the idea in official circles. It was only then that the foundations of what was eventually to become the Local Defence Volunteers, or Home Guard, were truly laid. Lord Cobham, of the Council of County Territorial Associations, recalled its humble beginnings:

"In the present war, the first move in the formation [of the Local Defence Volunteers] was made in November 1939, when Colonel Sir Francis Whitmore, Lord Lieutenant of Essex, came to see me on a matter that was giving him some concern. It appeared that an odd formation, known as the 'Legion of Frontiersmen', was carrying out rapid recruiting from men in Essex who were not liable to be called up for the Services. Sir Francis wanted the War Office to know all about this quite unofficial undertaking. The following morning, I had a talk with the Adjutant General, Sir R. Gordon-Finlayson, about this, and he agreed that, if encouragement were given to the creation of a volunteer force of this nature, it was likely to meet with a very ready response all over the United Kingdom.

I told him that in the last war there was a similar body raised, at the start wholly unauthorised, under the title of 'Voluntary Training Corps', and that we in the office of the C.C.T.A. had a Memoranda on this force drawn up in 1919 by Colonel Golightly, who was then Secretary of the Council of County Territorial Associations. He asked for this Memoranda, and in due course I took it to him at Hobart House, where we had a discussion on it with Major General L.K.H. Finch and Brigadier General G.E. Sim, belonging to the Adjutant General's department. It was decided then that these two officers should draw up the outline of a scheme for the formation of battalions of Local Defence Volunteers all over the country." 7.

The groundwork, then, had already been laid long before the dramatic events of May 1940 brought the scheme to the forefront. General Kirke, himself, had been considering the problem of how to channel civilian enterprise and enthusiasm for defence into a constructive organisation for some time. His greatest fear was still that the meagre numbers of formations left to Home Forces would have to be spread in penny packets all over the country on anti-parachute or similar duties. He recalled of the meeting on 11th May:

"A proposal was put forward to attach parties of the British Legion on a shift system to Searchlight Detachments to attack parachutists. This was opposed by me. I want local forces to defend their own localities and pin the enemy or localise his operations until the Regular Army can arrive. There is great pressure from all sides to disperse troops on static guards." 8.

7. CAB 106/1188: Memoranda by Lord Cobham and Colonel Golightly on the Origins of the L.D.V. and Home Guard: Memoranda by Lord Cobham, 9 March 1945.

8. Kirke Papers: op. cit.

The outcome of the meeting on the 11th May was that General Kirke and the Adjutant General together compiled a draft message to the public, which they intended General Kirke should broadcast the next day. The hope was to attach the units of local volunteers thus raised to the small armed search-light detachments which already existed and were spaced at intervals all over the country. A further meeting to discuss details followed on the 12th, at which it was agreed that, to give special weight to the appeal for volunteers, the newly appointed Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden, should himself deliver the broadcast. On the next day, the War Cabinet gave its approval to the project and that evening Anthony Eden drafted his broadcast from the notes already prepared by General Kirke and General Gordon-Finlayson. At a meeting at 10.00 a.m. at the Horse Guards on the 14th, further aspects of the L.D.V. were discussed.

On the evening of 14th May, immediately after news of a turn for the worse in the war situation in France had been announced, Anthony Eden delivered his historic broadcast to the British people:

"I want to speak to you tonight about a form of warfare which the Germans have been employing so extensively against Holland and Belgium..... We are going to ask you to help in a manner which I know will be welcome to thousands of you. The Government has received enquiries from all over the Kingdom from men who wish to do something for the defence of the country. Now is your opportunity. We want large numbers of such men in Great Britain, who are British subjects between the ages of 17 and 65, to come forward now and offer their services. In order to volunteer, what you have to do is to give in your name at your local police station....."

The force was to be known as the 'Local Defence Volunteers', the name describing its duties. It was to be voluntary and unpaid, but when on duty it would form part of the Armed Forces of the Crown. The duties of the force could be undertaken, except in an emergency, in a Volunteer's spare time, and Volunteers, who should be of reasonable fitness and with a knowledge of firearms, would, if accepted, be armed and provided with uniforms, and were expected to serve for the duration of the war. Anthony Eden's broadcast ended on a rousing note:

"The appeal is directed chiefly to those who live in country parishes and small villages. Here then is your opportunity. Your loyal help will make and keep your country safe." 9.

The response was immediate and astonishing. Within a few hours, police stations all over the country were thronged with volunteers waiting to be enrolled. Thousands of ordinary citizens could now feel that at last they could do something to help their country in her hour of need:

"Ex soldiers, now considered too old for fighting, could show that they were not too old. Lads of seventeen and middle-aged civilians could show that they were as good as the old soldiers. Civilians of military age who had been prevented from joining the Services by reason of the value of their civilian work could now give their scanty leisure to training as part-time soldiers. Civilians, and there were many, who had never before shouldered a Service rifle and who hated the Army and all its works, could now row in with the others and, in so doing, forget some of their prejudices and many of their fears." 10.

The German propaganda machine, however, reacted by announcing that members of this "mob of amateurs, armed with broomsticks and darts", an accusation at first not too wide of the mark, would, if captured with arms in their hands, be treated as 'franc-tireurs' and be shot outright. 11.

By 20th May, just six days later, no less than 250,000 volunteers had come forward and the figure rose to 300,000 by the end of the month. Over a million volunteers were to be enrolled in less than eight weeks. The problems of organising and equipping such a vast number of men, however, almost overwhelmed the authorities and was doubly accentuated by a combination of reverses in France and the German threat to shoot L.D.V. members outright, which meant that proper uniforms would have to be provided instead of the detachable white L.D.V. armbands. To administer, train and equip this huge force required a well tried organisation, and the existing military one was already strained to breaking point by the rapidly worsening position of the B.E.F. overseas. The local County Territorial Army and Air Force Associations throughout the country were, therefore, selected to organise and administer the force and to supervise training on a local level, while the central direction was placed with the Army Council on 17th May. Operational control was vested in the C.-in-C., Home Forces. These bodies decided that the role of the new force was to be, in order of importance, the observation and prompt reporting of information by means of observation posts; the delay, obstruction and harassment of the enemy by every possible means; the

10. Street, A. G.: From Dawn to Dusk, p. 10. Harrop, London, 1942.

11. CAB 106/1189: Home Guard: Summary Report prepared by J. K. Howard and H. Wendell Endicott, p. 14, June 1941.

protection of specific vulnerable points; a continuous check on subversive activities; and a close co-operation at all times with the Civil Defence services. ¹².

The greatest problem, however, was to be the vital one of arming the new force. There were only enough military rifles for a third of the volunteers, and the rest had to be supplied with hastily gathered shotguns or sporting rifles, or improvised weapons such as golf clubs, bayonets tied to broomsticks, pitchforks or bludgeons. To supplement this hotch-potch of improvised arms, thousands of 'Molotov Cocktails' - ordinary wine bottles filled with petrol and tar, with twisted tow soaked in paraffin round the neck, which was lit with a match before throwing - were mass-produced locally utilising the resources of the local public house and petrol station.

The 20th (Hailsham) Battalion, Sussex Home Guard, situated near the vulnerable Pevensey beaches in East Sussex on the increasingly threatened South Coast, may be taken as a typical example of the state of the Local Defence Volunteers late in May. Originally named 'B' Battalion, Sussex L.D.V., and one of 26 similar units raised in Sussex, it was formed at a meeting at Hailsham Police Station in May 1940. Lieutenant Colonel R. H. Johnson, D.S.O. was appointed Commanding Officer and the platoon commanders were selected from the volunteers attending the meeting:

".... each platoon commander was given a list of volunteers in his district and ordered to formally enrol them, commence immediate training and mount a night Observation Post on the highest point in his locality, or guard a Post Office or Telephone Exchange. One rifle, ten rounds of ammunition, a khaki cap and a white arm-band were issued for the use of each 15 men. These were passed from man to man as they went on night duty. Wherever possible, Observation Posts were linked by runner to the nearest Searchlight Post Mobile Column, which consisted of 4-6 men in a taxi-cab. Other than the ten rounds of ammunition, the Battalion were loaned a very limited number of shot guns and .22 rifles. Their only other weapon was the home-made 'Molotov Socktail'...." ¹³.

The Local Defence Volunteers by the end of May were very much in their infancy, and at this early stage they provided a very dubious adjunct to the scanty divisions of Home Forces. Even those of its number equipped with

12. Street, A. G.: op. cit., pp. 13-14.

13. Brigadier G. W. Sutton Papers (GSO I Home Guard, Sussex District), 72/59/5: Farewell of the 20th Sussex Battalion, Home Guard (Strange, Eastbourne, 1944).

military .303 rifles were no match for the superbly armed, trained and experienced German paratroopers, which they were expected to have to deal with at any moment. At worst, the Volunteers might usefully supplement the work of Home Forces by giving the alarm. However, the presence of these eager amateur 'parashooters' in every town and village did much to boost civilian morale at a time when defeat followed defeat on the Continent, since it showed the new Government's determination to resist.

As the deteriorating situation on the Continent brought the Germans ever closer to our shores, a host of other improvised measures were hastily being put in hand. At the same time as the L.D.V. were being raised to deal with parachutists, the authorities were considering additional measures to counter the expected threat from enemy airlanding troops. On 12th May the War Cabinet, discussing reports of the German success in landing aeroplanes on "open spaces such as car parks and football grounds in Holland", instructed that a reconnaissance should be made of "all open spaces in the United Kingdom which might be used as landing grounds by enemy troop-carrying aircraft" and that "the necessary steps to ensure they are rendered unusable" should be taken. ¹⁴. Headquarters, Home Forces, however, realizing the immensity of the task of planning obstructions for "all" open spaces, took a more practical approach. The War Diary of Headquarters, Home Forces, records that on 15th May reconnaissances were undertaken:

".... of open spaces in the Metropolitan District which might be suitable for enemy landing places; similar reconnaissance is being carried out by R.A.F. over areas within 5 miles of aerodromes on the East Coast.... Orders issued to Eastern Command, Northern Command and Scottish Command to carry out reconnaissances of areas within 5 miles of Eastern ports with a view to preventing enemy aircraft landing." ¹⁵.

Anthony Eden reported to the War Cabinet on the 18th May that:

"It was impossible to deal with all possible open spaces, but it was proposed to take the necessary action in the neighbourhood of specially important objectives, such as aerodromes, R.D.F. stations, power stations, etc.." ¹⁶.

14. CAB 65/7: WM 119th (40):3, 12 May 1940.

15. WO 166/1: op. cit., May 1940.

16. CAB 65/7: WM 127th (40):16, 18 May 1940.

General Kirke recalled that the Cabinet soon moderated their initial enthusiasm for obstructing all open spaces:

"The Cabinet, whilst anxious about landings, is also anxious that England should not be torn up to prevent aircraft alighting." 17.

Over the next few weeks, efforts were made to obstruct the most obvious landing sites by blocking open spaces with baulks of timber or derelict cars or by the use of criss-cross lines of trenches or ditches and hummocks of earth spaced in an alternating pattern, carefully designed to tip over aeroplanes or gliders attempting to alight. Later, huge steel hoops, like huge rose pergolas, were constructed over arterial roads in the South, such as the A3, to deter the pilots of JU 52 transports. However, even the scheme for obstructing all potential landing grounds within a given distance of vital objectives was found, in practice, to be somewhat overambitious, especially since the various obstacles often interfered with the farming of vital food-producing arable land, thus conflicting with the 'Dig for Victory' campaign and, consequently, large areas of open space, which might be considered to be vulnerable to landings, remained entirely unobstructed throughout the War.

Many of the immediate measures, being put in hand during May 1940, were extremely haphazard. Towards the end of May, as the evacuation from Dunkirk began and rumours of spies abounded, a multitude of road blocks sprang up all over the country - on roads entering towns and villages, on roads leading inland from ports or beaches, on the seafront itself, on road or railway bridges, and on the approaches to vulnerable points such as aerodromes. These roadblocks at first consisted of any material that was lying near to hand. Farm carts, scrap cars, oil drums, tar barrels, tree trunks, flimsy wooden trestles supporting horizontal poles wrapped in barbed wire, plain concertina wire and even beach-huts in seaside towns were used, though soon cast concrete blocks of various shapes and iron rails, that could be dropped into ready-made slots set into the road, made their appearance. Many of the first efforts were thrown up by over-enthusiastic newly enrolled Local Defence Volunteers, who were being formed into squads or sections under their local leaders to defend each barricade and into platoons to defend each village or group of streets. Identity papers were carefully

17. Kirke Papers, op. cit.

checked at every barricade by the men manning them, the idea being to detect and intercept immediately any enemy in disguise or any fifth columnist, and to provide a local rallying point for defence against parachutists. A motorist might be stopped several times at makeshift barricades in as many miles, especially near the East Coast, and asked to show his papers at each one. To refuse or to be unable to produce identification would mean certain arrest and if he drove on he might well be shot, as indeed several people were in the precarious weeks immediately following the Dunkirk evacuation.¹⁸ All this, however, had the effect of seriously hampering the movements of the troops and stores of Home Forces, movements which would be vitally important in the event of the 'Julius Caesar' Plan having to be put into operation.

Preparations, too, to render useless all ports on the East and South-East Coasts from The Wash to Newhaven, to deny to the enemy the use of the railways and to prepare bridges for demolition, were rapidly being made for the first time in May, on the advice of the Home Defence Executive. The actual orders were issued by Headquarters, Home Forces, to Commands on the 20th May, the same day as the spearhead of the German armour had reached the Channel coast, and just three days later it was judged that the threat had extended even further westwards, since on 23rd May Southern Command was ordered "to prepare plans for the immobilisation of Portsmouth and Southampton on the same lines as ordered for other ports".¹⁹ Two degrees of destruction had already been envisaged by the Home Defence Executive. If recapture within seven days were likely, the temporary removal or immobilisation of transport or facilities and destruction of minor obstacles, with the aim of causing delay to the enemy, would suffice. In the last resort, systematic total destruction, to prevent capture, would be undertaken. In the latter case, ports might be rendered unusable by the destruction of power supplies, cranes, dock gates and caissons, the obstruction of harbour entrances by blockships and the mining of approaches; railways immobilised by the derailment of engines in tunnels, the removal, derailment or destruction of rolling stock and the destruction of power houses on electric lines; and both railways and roads by the destruction of viaducts, bridges and culverts, and by cratering at suitable places such as embankments. It was realized, sensibly, that decisions as to the actual choice

18. Street, A. G.: op. cit., pp. 31-32, 34.

19. WO 166/1: op. cit., May 1940.

of points for destruction would have to be made locally and each individual case would be considered on its merits. 20.

As early as 10th May, the Chiefs of Staff had determined that the most vulnerable stretch of coastline to a German landing was between The Wash and Sussex, and the Home Defence Executive shared their view. The German capture of the Netherlands redoubled the vulnerability of this area, since the Dutch, and very soon the Belgian, ports and estuaries could now be used to assemble enemy shipping rapidly and secretly, being relatively free from British aerial reconnaissance, while the previously long sea route was much shortened. General Kirke warned, in a memoranda written on 15th May, that:

"In view of the German capture of Holland, a seaborne attack on the East Anglian and north and east Kent coast carried out in a fleet of fast shallow draught motor vessels appears to be a possibility. I have no information as to whether Germany has any such boats or is in the process of building them, and request I may be kept informed of any developments of this nature." 21.

Such an attack might well be accompanied by a massive air offensive in order to achieve air superiority over a stretch of coastline, using the newly captured Dutch airfields. Due to the heavy engagement of German forces in Belgium and France, however, and the time needed to assemble enough shipping, it was felt that a full-scale invasion was not imminent, but that enough damage could be caused by even a small-scale seaborne raid on this stretch of coastline, especially if it were combined with airborne operations, as to make its subsequent defence, and therefore the defence of the entire United Kingdom, very difficult indeed.

Preventative measures were, therefore, immediately put in hand to guard this vulnerable coastline. The strengthening of the air defences, as always, took top priority and, on the 19th, Churchill ruled that no more fighter squadrons were to be sent to France. By the next day, the bulk of the air component had been returned to bases in England, from which they

20. CAB 80/10: COS (40) 349: Report by the C.-in-C., Home Forces, 13 May 1940. Appendix B: Record of Meeting of Sub-Committee, Home Defence Executive Committee, on Demolition of Ports, Roads and Railways, 11 May 1940.

21. CAB 80/11: COS (40) 361: Seaborne and Airborne Attack of the United Kingdom: Memoranda by C.-in-C., Home Forces, 15 May 1940.

were to patrol the Channel and cover the evacuation of the B.E.F.. At sea, light Naval forces were ordered to positions from which they might intercept an enemy seaborne expedition from the captured Dutch or Belgian ports and estuaries, while the minefields off the East Coast would be extended and strengthened. On the exposed coastline itself the priority was to set up some form of seaward defence that would fill the gaps between the defended ports and estuaries, such as the Humber, Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Harwich, Thames-Medway, Dover, Newhaven and Southampton-Portsmouth, and here the Navy came to the rescue. It was Admiralty policy to remove the large calibre guns from warships about to be scrapped and store them in warehouses to await the time when they might once again come in useful. Many of these had only ever been fired a few times during training or general practice and had often been removed from ships after only a small proportion of their expected life had expired. These ex-Navy guns were, therefore, removed from store and renovated, and within the next few months over 600 assorted guns were emplaced in what was known as the 'Emergency Battery Programme'. Most of these were to be placed in 'beach batteries' which were eventually to run in an unbroken chain from The Wash, along the East Anglian coast, down to the Thames estuary and Kent, and westwards past the Channel Narrows to the Portsmouth-Southampton area, so as to provide a front-line of coastal defences for the United Kingdom. Other guns were used to strengthen the fixed defences at the major or minor defended ports and fleet bases, or to cover estuaries, and about 50 ex-Naval 4" guns were later to be mounted on commercial lorry chassis so as to provide mobile batteries for beach defence. The 'beach battery' guns, usually of 6" calibre, were to be placed in concrete-lined pits complete with concrete magazines, crew accommodation, fire control, searchlights and command posts. Work was begun immediately and was carried out in great haste, using contract labour assisted by parties from the Royal Navy, Coast Artillery and the Royal Engineers. However, by the end of May, there was still an immense amount of work to be done on the scheme and progress was not helped by a realization that guns mounted in open pits, under the previously held assumption that a gun was a very small target for a warship to hit, were in fact highly vulnerable to attack by dive bombers. This meant that both existing and new gunsites needed brick or concrete rear and side walls to support a reinforced roof, an addition which took up further invaluable time, labour and materials, and severely restricted the angle of fire. Even then, the concrete roof was rarely thick enough to withstand a direct hit, and great emphasis had therefore to be placed on camouflage. 22.

22. WO 199: Military H.Q. Papers, Home Forces: Box Nos. 523-530 and 1110-1148 on Coast Artillery, May 1940 - Sept. 1944.

Following detailed discussions at the frequent meetings of the War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee and the Home Defence Committee during the hectic May days, a host of other emergency measures were now hastily put in hand. Besides ports, railways and roads, preparations were also made to deny the enemy the use of telephone and radio communications systems, public utilities and bulk stocks of essential foods, petrol and other commodities. Aerodromes, too, would be blocked by obstacles pushed out onto the runways and, if necessary, by cratering, while proposals were made on how to increase the number of static guards. Enemy aliens and members of subversive organisations or undesirable political groups, such as Fascists or Communists, who might pose a threat as a 'fifth column', were instructed to be interned, in spite of the fact that many were strongly anti-Nazi, though this action was taken partly for their own protection against civilian reprisals should the Germans start bombing cities heavily. Towards the end of the month, signposts carrying place-names were removed from road junctions and place-names on shopfronts, tradesmen's vans, railway stations, advertisement hoardings and even church notice boards were erased. Even milestones were removed. Many of these were buried only a few yards from where they once stood and have never been dug up since. Civilians were instructed to hide their food and immobilise their vehicles, including bicycles, when not in use. Even vessels on inland waterways were ordered to be immobilised. Restrictions were placed on the sale and possession of maps, plans and guidebooks, especially on the East Coast. On the 22nd May, the Government extended the extra powers, conferred on it at the opening of the War, to almost complete control over persons and property by the United Kingdom Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, while the Regional Commissioners were also given important powers. Churchill, meanwhile, began to deliver his famous fighting speeches, that were so to uplift the nation's morale during the dark days of 1940 and turn doubt and confusion into determination to resist to the last. ²³.

It was at this time, too, that orders were given that church bells were only to be rung to warn of an enemy parachutist or airborne landing. Lord Geddes, then Regional Commissioner for the South East, later recalled the origin of that order:

"It was at Tunbridge Wells. Lord Ironside, who was then C.I.G.S., was in my room, and there were also present General Thorne and, I think I am right in saying, my noble friend Lord Knollys. We had just got the first

23. Collier, Basil: History of the Second World War: The Defence of the United Kingdom, p. 105. H.M.S.O., London, 1957.

detachments of the Local Defence Volunteers formed, and the only part of the L.D.V. who had arms at that time were the Kentish and some of the Sussex Companies. The whole thing was very nebulous, and it was thought at any time we might see parachutists dropping from heaven. I think it was the C.I.G.S. who said: 'How are you going to get these L.D.V.'s together if parachutists suddenly appear?' And somebody in the room - not I, but I could not be sure of the others - said: 'Why, we will ring the church bells until we can think of something better.' That was early in May 1940, and the War Office has been thinking of something better ever since. The signal at that time was supposed to be used only in the counties of Kent and Sussex and in the rural areas, but somehow or other the order became more or less sacrosanct, and spread all over the country. It was trimmed and pruned, and sprouted new legs and arms, and it became one of the essential pillars of the defence of the country. It is a complete mystery to me why that should seem to be so, but I am assured by War Office representatives that it is." 24.

The Cabinet intended that even the Police, being an organised and disciplined body with a presence in every locality throughout the country, should be armed. However, the Police themselves were opposed to this; the Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, after full discussion with his Chief Superintendents, objecting that:

"Only a small proportion of the Police had been trained in the use of fire-arms, and provided that there was no shortage of personnel who could be armed, the Police should be kept for civil police work, of which there would be plenty, while available arms were issued to other personnel." 25.

The Prime Minister was characteristically reluctant to accept this view. General Kirke noted that:

"The Police are very obstructive about arming themselves. At the Chiefs of Staff's meeting, Winston backed me up saying that the civil measures required by me were to be carried out." 26.

In the event, except for certain special tasks proposed by the Minister for Home Security, Sir John Anderson, it was the acute shortage of weapons that effectively prevented the arming of the Police and, in any case, the Local Defence Volunteers were soon to undertake many of the proposed special tasks such as guarding police stations and vulnerable points against raiders or

24. CAB 118/28: The Ringing of Church Bells as a Warning of Impending Invasion: Parliamentary Debates: House of Lords Official Report Vol. 126, No. 45, 31 March 1943.

25. CAB 65/7: WM 132nd (40):12, 21 May 1940.

26. Kirke Papers, op. cit.

sabotage, patrolling rural districts and manning posts at key points such as bridges, so as to control and protect road movement. ²⁷.

Other anti-invasion measures discussed by the War Cabinet in May included the possibility of evacuating children, pregnant women, invalids and old people from the East and South Coast towns, and Churchill's proposals for bringing back eight regular battalions from India to strengthen Home Forces. As the turn of events in France and Norway grew daily more and more desperate, the Government and the Chiefs of Staff became increasingly anxious, not only about the protection of the vulnerable East and South Coasts, but also about the security of the remoter extremities of the British Isles.

The question of possible German action against Eire, by means of parachute troops acting in consort with a strongly anti-British 'fifth column' including the I.R.A., was raised for the first time at a War Cabinet meeting on 14th May and it was decided that, although there was a British division, the 53rd (Welsh), available in Ulster, which could co-operate against the Germans in Eire if necessary, we should:

".... at all costs avoid swinging Irish opinion against us by taking the initiative in the infringement of their neutrality, for example by the seizure of ports."

The meeting decided that the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs should draw the attention of the Irish Government to the possibility of a German airborne invasion. ²⁸. The War Cabinet was, however, aware that the Germans might be spreading rumours with the idea of tempting the British into the infringement of Eire's neutrality and this possibility was reinforced on the 20th May when a telegram for His Majesty's Ambassador in Lisbon was read to it, which stated that:

".... an anonymous source had reported that the Germans contemplated extensive parachute operations in Eire, which would then become their base for land and sea operations against the United Kingdom." ²⁹.

27. CAB 65/7: WM 137th (40):12, 24 May 1940; and CAB 67/6 WP(G) (40) 134, 23 May 1940.

28. CAB 65/7: WM 121st (40):6, 14 May 1940.

29. CAB 65/7: WM 131st (40):3, 20 May 1940: Telegram No. 187 from His Majesty's Ambassador in Lisbon, 18 May 1940.

At a further meeting on the 27th May, at which the Cabinet decided,

".... to make immediate approach to Mr. De Valera in order to bring home to him the danger facing Eire and the need, in order to combat it, for early and full co-operation with this country."

Viscount Caldecote, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, said that although De Valera seemed to be moving in the right direction and had said that he would even be prepared to accept assistance from Ulster, the Irish Prime Minister remained immovable on one particularly vital point that was to cause the British Government and the Services a great deal of frustration and worry in the context of the security of the United Kingdom against invasion over the next few months. This point was that De Valera:

".... did not want any assistance whatever until Eire had actually been attacked. This would probably be too late." 30.

The safety of the Shetlands, too, was a constant source of worry in high places, since if they were seized by a German expedition from Norway "it would mean a difficult combined operation to turn them out". Airbases might be established there to threaten the vital fleet base of Scapa Flow and indeed the whole mainland of Scotland, which was now weakly defended by only a single division, the 9th (Scottish). At a Chiefs of Staff meeting on 16th May, it was reported that "accumulated evidence pointed to the possible German intention of moving airborne troops from Norway" and the C.-in-C., Home Forces, was instructed to "re-examine the question of the strength of the forces available for Home Defence in the Shetlands and in Scotland, in view of the possible scale of attack that could be developed from the Norwegian Coast". 31. General Kirke was not happy about further commitments for his already over-stretched Home Forces. He considered that:

".... the Admiralty is panicking about the Shetlands, which have been strongly reinforced, and preparations have been made to destroy the aerodrome. I issued definite instructions as to the priority of defence measures." 32.

30. CAB 65/7 & CAB 65/13: WM 141st (40):9, 27 May 1940.

31. CAB 79/4: COS 131st (40):2, 14 May 1940; and COS 135th (40):5, 16 May 1940.

32. General Kirke Papers: op. cit.

As the situation rapidly deteriorated in Belgium and France, alarmist rumours continued to abound. One of the greatest fears at this time was that the Germans might attempt to stage a "coup de main" against the King and the Government in London. A note from the Admiralty, which reached the Deputy Prime Minister, Clement R. Attlee, on 23rd May, outlined this rather unlikely possibility in detail:

"The Germans have always made a desperate attempt to capture the reigning sovereign and the Government. Why should ours be exempt?

.... The enemy may think it quite a feasible proposition to attack and isolate London, and this attempt would presumably follow the usual procedure of attacking and occupying key points outside London, such as Croydon, Weybridge, Slough.

So we may imagine that at or about 3 a.m. on the given day, the selected areas, without much warning, will be heavily bombed, followed, in the dust and confusion, by parachutists and troop carriers. From experience abroad, there seems little doubt that for a time at least they might well be successful.

London would be wholly or partially isolated; rail, road, telephone and telegraph communications cut, and chaos reign. We cannot imagine the enemy would be content with this. On the contrary, it may be expected that bombers flying high will appear over London and drop bombs quite indiscriminately, followed by shooting down balloons and diving attacks on Government Offices. In the confusion that this would cause, they might at some time or other, and possibly pretty early, drop parachutists in the parks and Horse-Guards Parade in an endeavour to seize the King, Government and Department Chiefs, destroy the War Office, Admiralty and so on...."

This might be followed by a seaborne landing on the East Coast, covered by the German airforce:

"All the heads are now isolated from their bodies, the members of the Government may be prisoners or fleeing, fighting will be going on continuously all round London, the coast ports and finally London will be under bombing attack hour after hour, until it surrenders like Rotterdam. This may be the enemy's plan. It would admittedly be a costly and desperate effort by the enemy, but does anyone suggest he is not desperate? Only one man may know the day and how, but it is not difficult to anticipate. The action to take is clear, before it is TOO LATE. WE HAVE BEEN WARNED." 33.

33. CAB 118/55: Correspondence on Home Defence: 1940-42. Note covering Paper on Seizure of London from F. J. C. Allen, Esq. of the Admiralty to Deputy P.M. Mr. C. R. Attlee, 23 May 1940.

Since the Germans still had the great bulk of their forces very heavily committed on the Western Front, there was little immediate danger of such an attempt occurring. Reports of German parachute landings, however, continued to come in. Many of these were exaggerated rumours caused by harmless, though unusual, occurrences. On 15th May, the Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Cyril Newall, told the War Cabinet that:

".... there had been several reports, none substantiated, regarding parachute 'descents' in the United Kingdom on the previous night. In some cases, these were traced to balloons struck during a thunderstorm over North London. These rumours were indicative of the nervous state of the public." 34.

Despite the climate of rumour, the War Cabinet continued to take such reports seriously. On the 24th, it discussed the contents of a telegram from the British Ambassador in Rome, which alleged that, "talk was current in German circles that Herr Hitler was determined on the invasion of the United Kingdom." Various dates and plans were mentioned and the report suggested that the British authorities were "asleep and unduly confident in British command of the sea". 35.

Indeed, this last accusation had been very close to the mark until only two weeks previously and it was only now that the British authorities were beginning to really wake up to the possibility of an invasion attempt in the near future. Major General Hastings Ismay, advising the Prime Minister on the 22nd that full powers should be given forthwith to the military authorities to enable them to carry out defensive measures of all kinds, "without reference to any other authority and without the hampering forms of procedure", wrote:

"It has hitherto been thought that a seaborne invasion of this country was an enterprise which the Germans could not hope to launch with any prospect of success for some considerable time. Moreover, it has been assumed that the sequence of events would be first a sustained attack to destroy our Air Force, then an airborne invasion to seize a port, after which the seaborne invasion would take place. Hence our Home Defence preparations at the present time are mainly directed towards dealing with the problem of parachute troops and with the protection of ports from the landward side. I think the events of the last few days and the grim possibilities of the next must cause us to modify our views."

34. CAB 65/7: WM 123rd (40):15, 15 May 1940.

35. CAB 65/7: WM 137th (40):9, 24 May 1940: Telegram No. 630 from His Majesty's Ambassador in Rome, 22 May 1940.

He continued:

"In view of past experience in Norway, Holland and France, it can be taken for granted that the Germans have the plan for the invasion of this country worked out to the last detail and have provided all necessary special equipment.... We can be sure that Hitler would be prepared to sacrifice 90% of the whole expedition if he could get a firm bridgehead on British soil with the remaining 10%.... Recent events have shown the terrible results which can be achieved by armoured forces operating through a country which has not been prepared to oppose them." ³⁶.

With the crisis worsening day by day on the Continent, the Chiefs of Staff were now beginning to face up to the fact that the Germans might attempt a full-scale invasion in the near future, after minimal preparation and possibly following hard on the heels of the evacuation of the B.E.F., 'Operation Dynamo', which began on 26th May. On 22nd May, two days after General Guderian's 'panzers' had reached the Channel coast, the Chiefs of Staff reported on the threat of seaborne and airborne attack on the United Kingdom, a danger that had already been much increased by the fall of Holland. The Chiefs of Staff had by now reviewed the threat, taking into account the much wider base bordering on the English Channel that would be in enemy hands should their present land attacks succeed in securing for them the coast of Belgium and north west France. This would mean that, not only would much of England's south coast come within easy range of enemy short-range fighters and dive-bomber aircraft, but the sea routes across the English Channel were very short and the Germans could mass shipping for a large invading force in the many suitable ports along the captured Continental coastline. The Chiefs of Staff believed that no such invasion could be prepared without their knowledge and "in the meantime the East Coast remains the most profitable area for invasion". Nevertheless, they noted that "the possibility of invasion on the South Coast creates a new threat to meet, for which plans must be prepared". They believed, however, that an invasion could not be mounted for several weeks, since:

"Germany would have to consolidate her position in Northern France and Belgium, neutralise at least in some measure our Naval forces, and obtain a large degree of air superiority before she would be ready to launch a large-scale seaborne attack from the French Channel ports. This would take some time...."

They continued, however, on a note of warning:

36. CAB 65/7: WM 133rd (40):11, 22 May 1940. Annex: Minute from H. L. Ismay to Prime Minister, 22 May 1940.

".... we cannot ignore the possibility that action in the form of air-borne, and to a lesser extent seaborne, raids might be taken very soon after she had gained control of the coast line bordering the English Channel." 37.

The Chiefs of Staff now began to feel, for the first time in the War, that the Kent sector was becoming particularly vulnerable to any attempted invasion which might be mounted by the Germans, either combined with a landing elsewhere, say in East Anglia, or even as a primary objective by itself. The attraction of Kent to the Germans, they believed, was strong, the object of such an invasion being:

".... to secure a base for land operations against London, in order to secure the richest and most densely populated area in the Kingdom and to jeopardize, if not paralyse, the Government in its prosecution of the War. London and its port would then provide the base for subsequent operations.... Kent forms a salient favouring converging air attack." 38.

Unknown to the Chiefs of Staff until after the War, their appreciation of the probable sequence of invasion, made as early as 21st May, was to reflect closely the line of thinking that was to be embodied in the German plans for 'Operation Sea Lion', which were produced later in that fateful summer of 1940. The Chiefs of Staff assumed, prophetically as it was to turn out, that the Germans' first step would be to attempt to achieve air superiority by attacking fighter aerodromes and centres of communication. If this were successfully achieved, airborne landings would follow to seize all approaches to Kent from London and the West. These preliminary operations would be combined with intensive air attacks on shipping, harbours and coast defences. Finally, the Chiefs of Staff expected the Germans to launch their seaborne invasion, using air action and minelaying to deny the narrow sea approaches to the British light Naval craft. The German emphasis would still be on seizing a port "such as Newhaven, Dover, Folkestone or Sheerness", and they would aim at tactical surprise. The Chiefs of Staff believed that the Germans had ample shipping available for the invasion, but erroneously thought that Germany "presumably possesses sufficient landing craft for the initial effort against Kent beaches". The whole operation would depend on adequate port facilities to be available in Holland, Belgium and north west France, and, of course, on complete German air superiority. The invasion of Kent, the Chiefs of Staff concluded:

37. CAB 80/11: COS (40) 376: Seaborne and Airborne Attack on the United Kingdom, 22 May 1940.

38. CAB 80/11: COS (40) 371 (JIC); and JIC (40) 77: German Invasion of the United Kingdom (with particular reference to the Kentish Coast), 21 May 1940.

".... would be carried out on methodical lines with the utmost drive and energy, and the maximum sustained effort in the air, on land, and by sea, of which Germany is capable. The operations would be undertaken ruthlessly and regardless of loss. The military side would be intimately linked with sabotage and similar activities by airborne troops and the Fifth Column, and also with subsidiary operations designed to mislead and mystify the defence in its control and to cause dispersion by subsidiary feints from the least expected directions. The dissemination of false reports, alarmist rumours and contradictory orders would play a prominent part. Full run would be given to ruse and artifice." 39.

On 25th May, the day before 'Operation Dynamo' began, the Chiefs of Staff submitted a report on British strategy should French resistance collapse completely, involving the loss of a substantial proportion of the B.E.F., and the French Government were to surrender to the Germans. This very serious situation, the Chiefs of Staff felt, was becoming increasingly likely to happen. It would leave the United Kingdom and its sea approaches exposed at short range to the concentrated attack of the whole of the German naval and air forces operating from bases extending from Norway to Brittany, and the threat of invasion would be ever present thereafter. Given these circumstances, and assuming that Italy too would be hostile, but that the United States would give "full economic and financial support", the Chiefs of Staff stated that it was "impossible to say whether or not the United Kingdom could hold out", but that, whether the Germans opted for a blockade to starve the country out, an invasion, or a 'knock-out blow' to try to bring Britain to her knees, their opening move would probably be heralded by air attack, a form of attack that must be met and defeated if Britain were to survive. They, therefore, saw no reason to revise their conclusion of early May that "the crux of the whole problem is the air defence of this country". Britain, meanwhile, should be "organised as a fortress on totalitarian lines" and the public fully informed of the dangers confronting them. 40.

The Air Staff, too, realized only too well that everything depended on a successful air defence. Only the previous day they had pointed out that the Germans might use their large, well trained, and experienced parachutist force to administer a 'knock-out blow' to the air defence of the United

39. *ibid.*

40. CAB 66/7: WP (40) 168; and COS (40) 390: British Strategy in a Certain Eventuality, 25 May 1940.

Kingdom. Of the 5,000 trained German parachutists available, 500 might be dropped simultaneously at each of the seven vital sector stations in South East England. This action would have the effect of not only destroying hangars and aircraft, but would also wreck the Operations Room arrangement controlling Air Defence, so that troop-carrying planes bringing reinforcements might land in numbers without effective air opposition. Sustained bomber attacks could then be mounted on the other aerodromes with relative impunity and the Germans would secure air superiority over South East England for a sufficient period to cover the landings by sea. 41.

Once the Germans had achieved the necessary air superiority, the Chiefs of Staff believed that even if a reasonable proportion of the B.E.F. could successfully be evacuated so as to bolster Home Forces, the British prospects of repelling a German invasion would be slim indeed. They pointed out, in their appreciation of 25th May,

"Germany has ample forces to invade and occupy this country. Should the enemy succeed in establishing a force, with its vehicles, firmly ashore, the Army in the United Kingdom, which is very short of equipment, has not got the offensive power to drive it out." 42.

Britain's predicament as a whole was summed up by the Chiefs of Staff in a review of their report the very next day, 26th May:

"While our Air Force is in being, our Navy and Air Force together should be able to prevent Germany carrying out a serious invasion of this country.

Supposing Germany gained complete air superiority, we consider that the Navy could hold up an invasion for a time, but not for an indefinite period.

If, with our Navy unable to prevent it and our Air Force gone, Germany attempted an invasion, our coast and beach defences could not prevent German tanks and infantry getting a firm footing on our shores. In the circumstances envisaged above, our land forces would be insufficient to deal with a serious invasion." 43.

41. HF Bundle 47/3, Paper 14 B, 24 May 1940.

42. CAB 66/7: WP (40) 168; and COS (40) 390: British Strategy in a Certain Eventuality, 25 May 1940.

43. CAB 66/7: WP (40) 169; and COS (40) 397: British Strategy in the Near Future, 26 May 1940.

* * *

The Chiefs of Staff's sobering conclusions only stated the truth. Towards the end of May 1940, Home Forces were at their weakest in equipment, trained manpower and formations available than at any time in the War, either before or after this date. General Kirke was left with the meagrest of forces to carry out his 'Julius Caesar' Plan, if it were required to be implemented. The cream of the British Army, the best trained formations, plus almost all of the most modern equipment, and there was little enough of this available in any case, had been sent over with the B.E.F. to France and Norway, much of it soon to be irretrievably lost.

In the middle of May, Home Forces had been considerably weakened by the removal of its most valuable single asset, the relatively powerful 1st Armoured Division. This division comprised most of the United Kingdom's armoured strength and had hitherto been the main contributor towards the vital role in Home Defence that Winston Churchill, at a meeting of the War Cabinet on 9th May, described as:

".... the first essential of a successful defence against invasion is the holding of compact mobile forces composed of good troops, armed with complete and up-to-date equipment, ready to strike any force landing in the country." 44.

It had been accepted for some time that 1st Armoured Division would be despatched to France in the near future and that a replacement formation was urgently required if the 'Julius Caesar' Plan were to continue to have any credibility in countering an attempted invasion. Shortly before the opening of the German offensive on 10th May, the Secretary of State for War, then Oliver Stanley, worried about the lack of trained troops available at home, had even considered recalling the 5th (Regular) Division from France, so as to bolster Home Forces with the presence of a complete Regular Division and replace 1st Armoured Division in its vital role as the main part of H.Q. Reserve. This solution had been strongly opposed by the G.H.Q. of the B.E.F., which pressed for both the retention of the 5th Division (less its 15th Brigade, which was already in the United Kingdom, having returned from Norway), and the speedy despatch of 1st Armoured Division to France.

44. CAB 65/7: WM (40) 116th:1, 9 May 1940.

Finally, at its last meeting at 7.00 a.m. on 10th May, the Military Co-Ordination Committee had approved that:

"The 5th Division, which had been wanted for return to the United Kingdom, had been placed at the disposal of the C.-in-C. in France. The 1st Armoured Division would be held in this country." 45.

However, at the War Cabinet meeting at 12.30 p.m. next day, 11th May, General Ironside, the Chief of Imperial General Staff, pressed strongly that 1st Armoured Division should be sent to France immediately as Lord Gort requested, since "without this division, Lord Gort had no force suitable for a counter-attack". He convincingly argued that enough armoured and mobile forces would still remain in the United Kingdom to provide a large enough H.Q. Reserve to counter an enemy landing:

"If the Armoured Division went to France, we should still have 160 light tanks in this country. Further, it was proposed to organise twelve troops of tanks of various descriptions, which, although not suitable for operations in France, would be very useful to deal with the contingency of invasion. The Third [Fourth?] Corps, which included the Canadian Division, was now fit for operations. Two motorised battalions and one motorcycle battalion would also be kept in this country." 46.

The War Cabinet accepted General Ironside's arguments and immediately authorised the move of 1st Armoured Division to reinforce the B.E.F. in France. The move began the very next day and between 17th and 23rd May the main body, consisting of the 2nd (Light) and 3rd (Heavy) Armoured Brigades, plus the Support Group, disembarked at Le Havre and Cherbourg, while the detached 3rd R.T.R. reached the doomed port of Calais on the 22nd May. Thus, 134 Vickers Mk. VI light tanks, 30 Daimler scout cars and some 160 A 9, A 10 and A 13 Cruisers, which were according to G.H.Q. Home Forces' War Diaries the sum total of Cruiser tanks then existing in the United Kingdom, were mostly irretrievably lost to the strength of Home Forces. Not only did this departure severely weaken Home Forces, but in the event 1st Armoured Division arrived too late to play a decisive role in the campaign in France, and only a tiny handful of its tanks were ever to escape the debacle and be returned to England.

45. CAB 83/3: MC (40) 38th:1, 10 May 1940.

46. CAB 65/7: WM (40) 119th A:3, 11 May 1940.

Churchill, himself, was soon to have his doubts about the wisdom of the move and was understandably worried about the departure of Home Forces' only really credible reserve. He was also beginning to consider seriously the implications that a complete French collapse might have on the defence of the United Kingdom. On 18th May, in a memoranda to General Ismay, he suggested that:

"The Chiefs of Staff might consider whether it would not be well to send only half of the so-called Armoured Division to France. One must always be prepared for the fact that the French may be offered very advantageous terms of peace, and the whole weight be thrown on us." 47.

The Chiefs of Staff, however, were adamant that the whole of the Division, including the 3rd (Heavy) Armoured Brigade, should be despatched. They replied that:

"If the battle continues in France, the arrival of this Armoured Brigade, which includes 160 Cruiser tanks, may have results of the utmost importance. We recommend, therefore, that the flow should continue. If the battle goes against us, it will be possible to stop the flow at any moment, and probably to recover anything which has reached the other side, and has not come into action." 48.

Unfortunately for Home Forces, the Chiefs of Staff's hopes were proved, all too soon, to be vastly over optimistic.

The move of 1st Armoured Division to France was completed without interruption despite Churchill's worries. However, its departure left the armoured strength available to Home Forces at a very low level indeed. On 22nd May, the so-called 2nd Armoured Division in Lincolnshire was left with a mere 108 Vickers light tanks and 7 obsolete mediums, while the independent 20th Armoured Brigade, recently moved to mid-Anglia, mustered 28 Universal carriers, 24 'light wheeled tanks' (armoured cars, by any other name) and a paltry 11 Vickers light tanks. (See Appendix 5.) Hardly a single 2 pdr. armed tank remained with Home Forces, while the thin-skinned, machine-gun armed Vickers light tanks would be no match for any but the very lightest type of German tank. Luckily, a full-scale seaborne invasion was not expected for several weeks.

47. CAB 80/11: COS (40) 364: Home Defence, Note by the Prime Minister, 18 May 1940.

48. CAB 80/11: COS (40) 365: Home Defence, Report by the Chiefs of Staff, 18 May 1940.

Notwithstanding the obvious deficiency in armour, General Ironside, on 17th May, again attempted to reassure the War Cabinet that sufficient forces existed in the United Kingdom to deal with the possibility of airborne invasion at least. Reporting on the state of Home Forces at the War Cabinet meeting that day, he said that:

".... there was no shortage in numbers, but that quality was lacking in certain cases. He had spoken to the Commander-in-Chief on this point and had given definite instructions that they must imbue the troops with the spirit that they must at all costs fight. Among the good material in this country was the London Division, the 15th Brigade and the Canadians. In addition, the Regular Cavalry was being formed into armoured units. The possession of mobile artillery was a reassuring factor." 49.

The War Cabinet appear to have been put at their ease, but General Ironside was taking an unduly optimistic view in his assessment. Quality was indeed lacking and in most, not just 'certain', cases. On 22nd May, General Kirke still had a mere 14 divisions available for the 'Julius Caesar' Plan. (See Appendix 5.) This total was, in fact, six divisions more than were deployed on 3rd May, but only five out of the twelve Territorial Infantry divisions included in this number were first-line formations and few of these were yet trained to a standard that would enable them to cope effectively with modern warfare. Only 52nd (Lowland) and 1st Canadian Divisions in H.Q. Reserve, plus the 15th Brigade and 43rd (Wessex) Division, and possibly 1st London Division, were in anything approaching an advanced state of training and of these only 15th Brigade had yet seen a shot fired in anger. 1st Canadian Division, though keen and eager to get to grips with the enemy, had only been undergoing proper training since its arrival in Britain in January, while this division, together with 52nd (Lowland) and 43rd (Wessex), made up IV Corps, which was earmarked to depart for France in early June as reinforcement to the B.E.F..

The equipment situation for Home Forces, too, remained as poor as ever, the shortage of effective tanks being especially evident. Mobile artillery was available, but its lack of numbers, especially in modern field guns, hardly justified General Ironside's description of it as a "reassuring factor". The infantry divisions deployed for 'Julius Caesar' still only possessed between 12 and 18 field guns per division, on 22nd May, out of a theoretical establishment of 72 each, and these guns were almost all 18 pdrs.

49. CAB 65/7: WM (40) 126th:6, 17 May 1940.

or the equally obsolete 4.5" Howitzers. (See Appendix 5.) The only formations having the modern 25 pdr., or more likely the converted 18/25 pdr., at this time were the 20th Armoured Brigade with 8, 43rd (Wessex) Division with 19, 52nd (Lowland) Division with 10, and 12th Army Field Regiment (also in H.Q. Reserve) with 12 guns. Only the 1st Canadian Division was comparatively well equipped with no less than 36 25 pdrs., formed into three regiments. This gave a grand total of 85 25 pdrs., or 18/25 pdrs., with Home Forces, only three more than on 3rd May, since virtually all guns from new production had been shipped straight over to France.

As for anti-tank guns, there were available on 22nd May a total of only 33 2 pdrs., spread between the entire complement of 14 'Julius Caesar' divisions, a paltry eight of which were in H.Q. Reserve, with 1st Canadian Division. (See Appendix 5.) This total of 33 2 pdr. anti-tank guns was only three more than were available on 3rd May and meant that Home Forces, in its entirety, still possessed fewer anti-tank guns than were allocated in the War Establishment to a single division.

The Prime Minister knew the true situation and realized all too well that Home Forces had been left dangerously weak, because of the priority being given to the requirements of the B.E.F. in trained manpower and in all types of equipment. Pressing once again for the return of eight Regular battalions from India and for further measures to control aliens, Communists and Fascists, Churchill wrote on 18th May to General Ismay:

"I cannot feel we have enough trustworthy troops in England, in view of the very large numbers that may be landed from air-carriers preceded by parachutists."

Though he added:

"I do not consider this danger is imminent at the present time, as the great battle in France has yet to be decided." 50.

General Kirke, therefore, in the revision of his plans and dispositions, was faced with the unenviable task of having to defend the British homeland with a meagre and inadequate collection of mostly semi-trained and poorly

50. CAB 80/11: COS (40) 364: op. cit., 18 May 1940.

equipped formations against an invasion threat that could not only materialize in any combination of a multitude of forms of attack, directions and strengths, but also was becoming increasingly greater with each passing day. To add to his problems, he was also not entirely happy with the attitude of the new Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden, whom he evidently felt was too much occupied with his public image. On 21st May, General Kirke attended a meeting with Eden. He later wrote:

".... I endeavoured to explain the principles of the defence of Great Britain. He seemed more interested in some question in the House he's had to answer, and is evidently the complete politician. Two Staff Officers are engaged the whole time on commenting on newspaper criticisms. He's very like Hore Belisha in this respect." 51.

On 23rd May, General Kirke was summoned to present and explain his revised 'Julius Caesar' Plan to the Defence Committee (Operations). Essentially, the principles were little changed from those devised the previous November, but the area of coastline vulnerable to attack was continually being extended and the scale of the enemy assault, when it came, would now be much greater. Three days earlier, on the 20th, the Defence Committee (Operations) had expressed the view that, since the Dutch ports were more suitable for collecting considerable quantities of small shipping, the East Coast would still be most vulnerable and "little danger was anticipated from the Channel ports". 52. General Kirke, however, preferred to take a wider view. At the meeting on the 23rd, he said he believed that:

".... it was not possible to say where the enemy would land or what his objectives would be."

He therefore reasoned that the basic thinking behind the 'Julius Caesar' Plan still applied:

".... the principle underlying the defences was to dispose troops to cover vital objectives, while keeping as much as possible in mobile reserve."

He now had available for these tasks 14 divisions "in a varying state of training and equipment". Certain of these were located in areas along the coast, while others were in support and "three divisions" were in general

51. General Kirke Papers, op. cit.

52. CAB 69/1: DO (40) 5th:4, 20 May 1940.

reserve. He had also to dispose troops to guard against what was seen as a very real danger, that of an airborne invasion:

"Certain troops were also held within striking distance of London. For defence against parachute troops, it was arranged that every searchlight station up and down the country had a mobile detachment. These could summon small mobile reserves to help mop up." 53.

General Kirke still placed the emphasis on the defence of ports, since it was a safe assumption that, to maintain a successful invasion, the enemy would have to seize a port. Hence, top priority had been given to the strengthening of the defences of ports on the landward side, "so that it would not be possible for airborne troops or troops landed on neighbouring beaches to penetrate the port", as well as on the seaward side, where some 150 ex-Naval guns, which had already been made available under the Emergency Battery Programme, were in the process of being emplaced in suitable sites. Progress in this last task, however, was being slowed by a lack of holding-down bolts for the guns, which would take three weeks to manufacture, and by the need to provide enough gunnery officers and skilled gunners to supervise the working of the guns. Indeed, many of the officers even had to be recalled from retirement. 54.

In subsequent discussion at the meeting, attention was drawn to a possibility that had received minimal consideration up to this date, that of measures to prevent enemy forces, and especially tanks, from landing on the many exposed open beaches and then penetrating inland. There had been many reports that the Germans were preparing tank-carrying, flat-bottomed boats which might be speedily launched from close to our shores by specially constructed landing ships. Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Dudley Pound, Chief of the Naval Staff, correctly pointed out that "there was no reason to suppose that the Germans would require a port at which to land tanks", but he then went on to suggest a rather ambitious scheme to help prevent enemy tanks, landed on the beaches, from deploying inland:

".... at many points on the coast where landing was possible, the exit from the beach was through a comparatively narrow gap. If obstacles were placed in these gaps, therefore, sufficient delay might be imposed on the enemy's tanks to allow them to be engaged before they had time to penetrate inland."

53. CAB 69/1: DO (40) 6th:1, 23 May 1940.

54. *ibid.*

The First Sea Lord's suggestion was strongly supported by Vice-Admiral T. S. V. Philips, the Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff, who pointed out, in its favour, one of the major weaknesses of General Kirke's Plan, that of the chronic lack of anti-tank equipment. He thought that:

".... while mobile columns, which could move to engage the enemy as soon as he had landed, were the right means of defence in theory, they were robbed of half their value in practice by the fact that they had nothing to oppose tanks. The best hope, therefore, of repelling a landing by tanks would be to prevent them leaving the beach. It would be a big undertaking to block the exits of all practicable beaches, but he thought it ought to be done."

General Kirke, however, was not convinced of the merits of this scheme and objected strongly, emphasizing the practical difficulties of using beach obstacles on such a large scale. He argued that:

".... there were very large stretches of coast, particularly in East Anglia, where the beaches were quite open, and where tanks could land and penetrate inland at any point. An obstacle was of little or no value unless it were guarded, since the troops accompanying the tanks could easily break down the obstacle with explosives and clear a way for the passage of the tanks. To make an obstacle all along these open beaches and to spread troops out to guard it, would be playing the enemy's game. It could only be done at the expense of reserves. The enemy would soon penetrate the thin crust thus formed, and there would be nothing behind to oppose him in strength."

He steadfastly refused to be diverted from the militarily correct principles embodied in his 'Julius Caesar' Plan, that the defence of the ports, combined with the holding of adequate mobile reserves, should receive the first priority. The amount of labour available for construction work, too, was a limiting factor. He continued:

"There was a limit to the amount of construction work which could be planned and supervised in a short space of time. All efforts were now being concentrated on the defence of the ports to make them impregnable, and on preparing demolitions and obstacles on the approaches to London. If energy were dissipated on work all along the beaches, nothing would be done in time. Even if the enemy landed at a beach, he could not support his landing without the capture of a port. For this reason the protection of the ports took first place." 55.

General Kirke later recalled of this meeting:

"Pound is anxious to defend all beaches with obstacles. I pointed out that it was better to concentrate on active defence, and in preventing the enemy from getting a port, without which he could not land motor transport, guns, stores, etc.. We could consider extending the defences later. Obstacles were useless unless covered by fire, and could be removed by troops landed by air behind them. Mines on beaches were different, as they came as a surprise. Work depended on labour, which was insufficient. A class should be called up for that purpose." 56.

Nevertheless, despite General Kirke's own personal reservations, the Defence Committee agreed at the meeting that:

".... the provision of anti-tank obstacles to impede the progress of tanks landed on beaches on the East and South coasts deserved urgent consideration."

And the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, was duly instructed, "to take whatever action might be possible and to report to the Chiefs of Staff". 57.

Earlier in the day, General Kirke had also attended a meeting of the Home Defence Executive at which the same subject was discussed and where it was agreed that a special reconnaissance of the whole coast, carried out in conjunction with the Navy and the Air Force, "should be undertaken immediately". 58. General Kirke, therefore, had little choice but to order urgently the preliminary steps to be put into hand. The G.H.Q., Home Forces, War Diary records that straight after the Defence Committee meeting on the very same day, 23rd May:

"Orders were issued to Commands for reconnaissance of beaches on the East and South coasts between Wick and Swanage, to determine those suitable for the landing of tanks." 59.

General Kirke hoped that, as a result of this reconnaissance, which could mostly be carried out by air,

".... it will be possible to define more clearly those beaches from which there are few approaches inland and are therefore easier to defend,

56. General Kirke Papers, op. cit.

57. CAB 69/1: DO (40) 6th:1, 23 May 1940.

58. CAB 80/11: COS (40) 396: Home Defence, Protection of Beaches in East and South East England and the Control of Enemy Aliens. Note by the C.-in-C., Home Forces, 24 May 1940.

59. WO 166/1: op. cit., May 1940.

and those beaches from which access inland is easy. A scheme can then be prepared to utilise our means of defence to the best possible advantage, particularly mines which need not, like other obstacles, be covered by fire, if suitably hidden."

Indeed, General Kirke placed a great reliance on minefields, though few mines were yet available, because he would not have to spread his troops so much to cover them. He therefore urged:

".... that the manufacture of anti-tank and other forms of mines, suitable for use on beaches and approaches thereto, should be proceeded with at the maximum capacity of the plant available." 60.

The fact that the reconnaissance of beaches was ordered for the East and South coasts from Wick all the way to Swanage is interesting, because it marked a further extension of the area of coastline which was felt to be vulnerable to attack by the Germans, who were now gaining a firm grip both on northern France and north Norway. General Kirke noted on 25th May, following a meeting of the Home Defence Executive:

"The Executive consider that, in the present circumstances, the possibility of an attempt at invasion on the whole of the East and South coasts from the Shetlands to Swanage cannot be ruled out. The area of greatest danger of invasion proper is between the Tyne and Flanborough, and The Wash to Newhaven, inclusive.

Diversional landings may, however, be made in the North from Norway and in the West and South West from submarines or from Eire, if the enemy establishes himself there." 61.

The Executive recommended that a dawn patrol should be instituted by the R.A.F. forthwith to cover the coast from Sheringham to Newhaven.

It was to be nearly two weeks before the reconnaissance of beaches on the East and South coasts, ordered on the 23rd, was completed. However, in the meantime, work commenced almost straight away on beach defences along the East Anglian and South East coastline, so as to attempt to fill the intervals between the defended ports and the new gun sites. Indeed, on the 27th May, the Chiefs of Staff agreed that the preparation of the defence of

60. CAB 80/11: COS (40) 396, op. cit., 24 May 1940.

61. CAB 80/12: COS (40) 401: Invasion of the United Kingdom, Memoranda by the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, 25 May 1940.

beaches was "a matter of the highest importance" and that the construction of anti-tank obstacles "should not be confined to a few likely landing places, but they should be constructed on the widest possible scale." ⁶².

With so little time for reconnaissance, it was inevitable that the early work tended to be rather haphazard and that many mistakes were made at first. In response to General Kirke's plea for more labour, the War Cabinet agreed on the 26th May that:

".... save in regard to work on aerodromes, priority should be accorded, until further notice, to the requirements of labour and plant (for example, excavating and concreting machinery) for urgent defence works." ⁶³.

Gangs of civilian labourers were thus brought in to festoon the most vulnerable beaches with barbed wire, covered by hastily constructed pillboxes. Many of these early pillboxes were constructed at first with brick, since most of the available concrete was being used for the Emergency Batteries. They were often poorly sited, some having their embrasures pointing directly out to sea instead of along the shoreline to form a far more effective crossfire, while a few pillboxes even tumbled into the sea, having been built on unstable foundations.

General Kirke remained sceptical as to the merits of defending the beaches with extensive lines of obstacles. He much preferred that, besides defending the ports, the major emphasis of the defence should continue to be on mobile columns which could move rapidly to counter-attack any incursion on our shores. He was, therefore, far more worried about the problems which were likely to prejudice the success of such mobile military operations in the vulnerable coastal areas. Among the anxieties uppermost in his mind was the threat to military movement, not to mention security, posed by civilian weekend traffic to the coasts and, in the event of a German landing, by an expected torrent of refugees. General Kirke, therefore, began to press hard for various measures affecting the civilian population to be put rapidly into force. At the Defence Committee (Operations) meeting on 23rd May, he took the opportunity of the presence of the Prime Minister to put forward for discussion two proposals that were also about to be considered by the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

62. CAB 79/4: COS (40) 154th:4, 27 May 1940.

63. CAB 65/7: WM (40) 139th:2, 26 May 1940.

The first of these, which was greeted with approval, was that the East and South Coasts, from the North of Scotland to Southampton, should be declared a prohibited area, with entry allowed only for those holding a pass to prove they were on legitimate business and not visiting for pleasure. The Committee accepted General Kirke's warning that:

"The weekend traffic to the coast presented a great danger, since not only was congestion caused at all the ports, but the presence of a mass of cars right on the coast would be of great value to an enemy." 64.

General Kirke's second proposal, however, that women and children should be immediately evacuated from the neighbourhood of the threatened coastline, both for their own safety from German attack or British counter-attack, as well as to reduce the number of potential refugees which might hinder military movement in a time of emergency, received markedly less enthusiasm. The main objection was to the scale of the operation and to the problems of disruption and relocation it would cause. General Sir Hugh Elles, Chief of Staff to the Ministry of Home Security, said that a preliminary study to evacuate 60% of the population of Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Harwich and Felixstowe within a period of 48 hours, had indeed been made, but if the South and the remainder of the East Coasts were evacuated "the problem might assume unmanageable proportions". The Prime Minister, too, voiced his doubts and went further, declaring that he was:

"..... not at all convinced of the desirability of evacuating any of the population. When the time comes, they could be ordered to stay in their homes, and the people on the coast at points at which the enemy was not landing would be in no great danger, since the enemy would strike inland at important objectives."

Churchill accepted, though, that arrangements would have to be made to control the population "where operations were taking place" and the Chiefs of Staff were asked to study the matter further. 65.

The Chiefs of Staff's recommendations were considered by the Defence Committee two days later. The Committee agreed that, while it was not practicable "for political and administrative reasons" to evacuate women and

64. CAB 69/1: DO (40) 6th:1, 23 May 1940.

65. *ibid.*

children wholesale before the emergency arose, the voluntary evacuation of children, pregnant women and invalids should be initiated at once from all major East Coast towns between Yarmouth and Southampton. Priority for evacuation was to be given to 15 coastal towns - Great Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Felixstowe, Harwich, Walton, Frinton, Clacton and Southend in East Anglia, and Margate, Broadstairs, Ramsgate, Sandwich, Deal, Dover and Folkestone in Kent. The danger to the coastal towns of Sussex was not yet considered to be great enough to warrant evacuation. The remainder of the population of these 15 coastal towns was to be educated to realize that in the event of enemy action they must remain at home, since there they were safer than on the roads where "experience has shown they will be subject to deliberate air attack". An area approximately 10 miles deep on the East and South Coasts, from St. Kinnaird's Head in Aberdeenshire to Christchurch in Dorset, was to be declared a prohibited area, in which control of the movement of persons would be in the hands of the military authorities, including the L.D.V.'s. ^{66.} The Committee also approved that the military authorities should be given the necessary powers to enforce this, including powers of arrest, which was another measure that General Kirke had been pressing for. ^{67.}

At this meeting the Minister of Home Security, Sir John Anderson, revealed that a conference held earlier that afternoon had agreed that a scheme should also be prepared for a 60% evacuation of all persons in the coastal strip, which could be carried out in any particular area "if the War Cabinet decided that the enemy's action could be sufficiently foreseen to be able to specify the point of attack". ^{68.} This last scheme, however, might well be potentially very dangerous to implement in practice. It was unlikely that the precise location of an enemy landing could be determined until the last moment and this would probably not leave enough time for the evacuation of such a large number of people to be completed. If the enemy landing, therefore, occurred while evacuation was still under way, the result would inevitably be confusion and chaos as an orderly exodus dissolved into a panic-stricken mob which, quite aside from sustaining heavy civilian casualties on the roads from enemy air attack, would seriously impede and perhaps fatally delay the vital British reserves moving up into the area of operations. It was also unlikely that the coastal population

66. CAB 69/1: DO (40) 8th:1; and Annex, 25 May 1940.

67. General Kirke Papers, op. cit.

68. CAB 69/1: DO (40) 8th:1, 25 May 1940.

would remain at home in the area of the fighting, especially if their homes were being destroyed. The only real solution would be the evacuation of a significant proportion, say 60%, of the population of all the vulnerable coastal towns on the East and South coasts, well before any invasion was expected to be implemented, but in May 1940 the authorities were not prepared to go this far. It remained to be seen whether, in the coming months, the greatly increased threat of invasion would persuade them to change their minds.

At the same time as these discussions on various aspects of the invasion problem were proceeding, General Kirke was reviewing the dispositions of the formations of Home Forces in accordance with his revision of the 'Julius Caesar' Plan. Throughout the middle of May, General Kirke carried out a series of moves that reflected a significant change in emphasis of the thinking behind the 'Julius Caesar' Plan, though the principles of the Plan remained basically unaltered. The major change was a considerable shift of formations towards the East Coast and especially towards Eastern Command. Before the German offensive opened on 10th May, there had been no less than $8\frac{1}{2}$ divisions still undergoing training, mainly in Western and Southern Command, and only eight and part of a ninth were employed for 'Julius Caesar'. (See Map 4.) However, only two weeks after 10th May the pattern was very different. East Anglia was still seen to be the most vulnerable area to a German landing and General Kirke, therefore, considerably increased the strength of his forces there. (See Map 5.) The 18th (East Anglian) and 55th (West Lancashire) Divisions, in Norfolk and Suffolk, were rapidly reinforced by the 15th (Scottish), which was moved to the Essex coastline from Wiltshire. The 2nd London Division, less two battalions left to guard the capital, was repositioned from London to Cambridgeshire, while 43rd (Wessex) was brought forward from Dorset to Hertfordshire. These latter two divisions were thus conveniently placed, as Eastern Command reserves, to move to the support of the three divisions on the East Anglian Coast. Also in Eastern Command reserve, and with a similarly supporting role, was 20th Armoured Brigade, which was moved on 16th May to the Newmarket area in mid-Anglia. From this central position it could move quickly to counter-attack an enemy incursion at any point along the long East Anglian coastline, though its mixed bag of only 63 Universal Carriers, 'light wheeled' tanks and machine-gun armed Vickers light tanks would make its ability to fulfil this vital role successfully extremely suspect, to say the least. South of London, also within the Eastern Command area, 1st London Division in Kent was bolstered by

the move of 45th (West Country) Division from Devon to the coast of Sussex, so as to guard against the increasing German threat from Northern France. However, the fact that only these two divisions were deployed south of London during May reflected the general view that the enemy threat to this quarter, while increasing, was not yet severe. Thus, the number of divisions in total, deployed for 'Julius Caesar' under Eastern Command, was raised from three in early May to seven plus an armoured brigade towards the end of the month, quite a significant increase.

In Northern Command the number of divisions available for the Plan was similarly doubled, as the 54th (East Anglian) Division in Northumberland and the 2nd Armoured Division with its 108 light and medium tanks in Lincolnshire, were reinforced, first by 66th (Lancs. and Border) Division moving from Lancashire to Yorkshire and later by the 59th (Staffordshire) Division being brought forward from Staffordshire to Durham, both these latter divisions having been relieved of their previous duties in connection with aiding the civil powers in an emergency. (See Map 5.)

In Scottish Command, however, General Kirke saw the threat from Norway to be relatively minor, now that the Germans were securing a far more convenient coastline for assembling an invasion fleet opposite East Anglia and the South East. On 19th May, he wrote:

".... I have only a certain number of troops [in Scotland] as I consider it preferable to maintain a preponderance in the East Anglian and the Home Counties areas and for the defence of London." 69.

General Kirke, therefore, left only one division on guard in Scotland, the 9th (Scottish). However, he also took the precaution of leaving a Brigade Group of the 54th (East Anglian) Division in H.Q. Reserve, so that from its position in Northumberland it could be easily sent to support either the Tyne-Tees area in Northern Command, or Scottish Command, if an emergency arose. The only two divisions in Home Forces, apart from the 53rd (Welsh) Division in Ulster, which now remained in a purely training role and were thus unavailable for 'Julius Caesar', were the 38th (Welsh) Division in South Wales and the 61st (South Midland) Division in the Midlands, both second-line formations.

69. CAB 80/11: COS (40) 368: Invasion - Security of Scotland and the Shetlands: Extract from a Letter from the C.-in-C., Home Forces, 19 May 1940.

General Kirke's redistributions, however, meant that the majority of divisions deployed along the East and South Coasts for the 'Julius Caesar' Plan were now semi-trained second-line Territorial divisions. Not only this, but their concentration for a possible operational role in these areas meant that they were often situated well away from the best training grounds which tended to be mainly in the West of the country. This, in turn, meant that future training would inevitably be seriously hampered, while all of these formations remained extremely ill-equipped to deal with an enemy well supplied with armour, since they lacked tanks, anti-tank guns and artillery, not to mention transport and much else.

Indeed, such was the weak state of Home Forces, combined with the strong possibility that the B.E.F. in France might be almost totally destroyed, that on 24th May the Chiefs of Staff decided to evacuate North Norway, the Flag Officer, Narvik, being informed by telegram that:

".... the reason for this is that the troops, ships, guns and certain equipment are urgently required for the defence of the United Kingdom." 70.

On the same day, too, the Prime Minister told the Defence Committee that:

".... in view of the danger of an invasion of the United Kingdom, we could not possibly send any more troops to France, and M. Reynaud was being informed accordingly." 71.

Churchill authorised the full-scale evacuation of the B.E.F. from Dunkirk just two days later, following the fall of Boulogne and Calais, though some further troops were in fact subsequently to be despatched to France in June.

General Kirke's dispositions, not to mention the process of training, were also hampered by another serious problem that refused to go away, that of continuously trying to find enough troops to guard the multiplicity of vulnerable points. Before the opening of the German offensive on 10th May he had had some considerable success in at least reducing the number of field troops employed on vulnerable points. However, as the invasion threat suddenly loomed much larger, he was once more bombarded with requests from all quarters to supply troops for this purpose.

70. CAB 79/4: COS (40) 146th:3, 24 May 1940.

71. CAB 69/1: DO (40) 7th:5, 24 May 1940.

The biggest demands were, as always, from the Air Ministry. So great was this problem that General Kirke complained bitterly to the Chiefs of Staff on 20th May:

"I am being daily asked to increase static guards in every direction, the last and most serious demands being from the Air Ministry.

The first, amounting to over seven battalions, is for the protection of [nine] aircraft factories as wide apart as Glasgow and Bristol.

An even more comprehensive demand has been made to protect the list of aerodromes [a total of 41 Fighter Command operational Sector Stations, other aerodromes and headquarters, 25 Bomber Command operational Stations, and 25 occupied R.A.F. aerodromes, in likely invasion landing areas] against the landing of a force of 500 parachute troops followed by troop carriers....

I am further asked to place guards on empty satellite aerodromes and on 22 additional unoccupied landing grounds, and this would not, of course, preclude the enemy from landing on an unlimited number of open spaces of which the R.A.F. themselves do not make use."

These demands would place an unacceptable burden on an already much over-stretched Home Forces. To guard the aircraft factories on the scale suggested by the Air Ministry, would, General Kirke objected:

".... entail the employment of the infantry of the division which at present is responsible for supplying a certain number of the mobile columns and for support of the Civil Power from Birmingham to Portsmouth. In that case it would be necessary to replace it by one of the three divisions in General Reserve, leaving only the Canadian Division and the 52nd Division to deal with major enterprises."

If the number of static guards were increased on all the aerodromes, the situation would be made even worse. To do this, he continued:

".... would immobilise the majority of the Field Army troops now available for an anti-invasion role and for the rapid reinforcement and immobilisation of any areas where parachutists or troop-carrying aircraft may be landed. My present system of defence is based on the principle of reducing static guards to the minimum number possible, with the object of keeping the largest possible proportion mobile and ready to concentrate towards any area where the static guard may have been overpowered, or where the enemy may have landed in open spaces not occupied by the R.A.F.. Undoubtedly, the protection of aerodromes would be greatly increased by the addition of one or two vehicles even lightly or partially armoured, but I have none such available other than two light tank regiments and one Army tank regiment, which it is essential to keep concentrated and ready to counter-attack as quickly as possible."

Not only this, but to guard unoccupied landing grounds in addition:

".... would entail the dispersion and dissipation of a still larger portion of the Field Army and most dangerously weaken my ability to deal with major offensives, since innumerable open spaces would still be available to the enemy."

General Kirke thought the Air Ministry's demands were far too high. He considered that the aircraft factories could be defended by half a company, that 300-500 troops were sufficient only for the more important Fighter Command Sector Stations and that most occupied aerodromes could be guarded by 50-100 men. He strongly believed that the mobile columns should be retained intact and that very few guards indeed could be spared for unoccupied landing grounds in invasion landing areas.⁷²

General Kirke's objections bore fruit. The Chiefs of Staff, meeting on the 22nd May, agreed with General Kirke's proposals rather than pander to the Air Ministry's demands. They suggested that L.D.V.'s might be used to increase the number of guards on Fighter Command airfields, while unoccupied aerodromes should only be provided with guards, preferably L.D.V.'s and searchlight trainees, only if there were no troops situated nearby. On no account were any of these guards to be provided at the expense of the mobile columns.⁷³ The Chiefs of Staff's decisions went some way to placate General Kirke. However, the problem was far from solved and the pressure on Home Forces to supply guards for more and more vulnerable points was inevitably to go on increasing with every passing day, as the invasion threat became more real.

A successful defence against an enemy landing in Great Britain, then, hinged as always on the few relatively well-trained and equipped formations that made up H.Q. Reserve. Early in May the H.Q. Reserve had consisted of three divisions - the first line Territorial 54th (East Anglian) Division in the Northumberland-Durham area, the 1st Armoured Division in Dorset and the 1st Canadian Division at Aldershot. (See Map 4.) However, by 23rd May, the 1st Armoured Division had departed to France, while only one brigade group of the 54th (East Anglian) Division was still designated for H.Q.

72. CAB 80/11: COS (40) 370: Home Defence, Memoranda by the C.-in-C., Home Forces, 20 May 1940.

73. CAB 79/4: COS (40) 145th:3, 22 May 1940.

Reserve. On 20th May the Regular 20th Infantry Brigade, previously located at Aldershot, also departed for France.

General Kirke now had the difficult task of filling the gap left by the departure of 1st Armoured Division and, to this end, he brought the first-line Territorial 52nd (Lowland) Division up from its training area in Dorset, between 23rd and 25th May, into H.Q. Reserve in the Swindon-Newbury area. (See Map 5.) From this position the 52nd (Lowland) Division, supported by the 12th Army Field Regiment with its twelve 25 pdrs., could intervene to counter-attack a German landing either in East Anglia or in South East England. The 52nd also acted as a relief to the 1st Canadian Division which General Kirke ordered on 27th May to move by road from Aldershot to the Kettering-Bigbam Ferriers-Northampton area, from where it could support both Northern Command and the considerable forces now deployed in the area regarded as most threatened of all, East Anglia. To further strengthen and co-ordinate Eastern Command, General Kirke also ordered on the 27th that the Eastern Command Reserve should be formed on a Corps basis with its headquarters at Aldershot. ⁷⁴.

The positioning of both these reserve divisions was sound, but, unfortunately, both the 52nd (Lowland) and 1st Canadian Divisions, virtually the only two relatively well-trained and reasonably equipped divisions now remaining with Home Forces, were earmarked by the War Office as early reinforcements to France to form a new B.E.F. south of the River Somme. Preparatory to these moves overseas, the War Office announced, without any warning, that they had taken over operative control of 1st Canadian Division, then still situated at Aldershot. General Kirke had had cause several times before to complain of what he regarded as continued War Office interference in his dispositions and this last action caused his anger to reach boiling point. He later recalled that on 24th May:

"The Canadians have been removed [from my command] by someone at the War Office direct, without even informing Home Forces that it had been done. They were my General Reserve. I protested to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Secretary of State." ⁷⁵.

74. WO 166/1: op. cit., May 1940.

75. Kirke Papers, op. cit.

This time his protests did, in fact, have some success, since three days later, on 27th May, the War Office instructed that 1st Canadian Division was to be returned, for the moment at least, to the operational control of Home Forces. ^{76.}

* * *

Notwithstanding his efforts in mid May 1940 to strengthen and modify his 'Julius Caesar' Plan to meet the escalating dangers posed by the rapidly changing circumstances of the campaign on the Continent, General Kirke's own days as Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, were numbered. There was a strong feeling in the corridors of power that changes in the high command of the Army should be made, and made very soon. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Ironside, had never been particularly happy in his exalted position at the War Office and for a long time he had been hankering after a fighting post. General Ironside had never regarded himself as a 'desk general'. Indeed, General Ironside's original appointment as C.I.G.S. in September 1939 had been part political, since the previous C.I.G.S., Lord Gort, had found it increasingly difficult to co-operate with the then Secretary of State for War, Lesley Hore-Belisha. Hore-Belisha had consequently appointed Lord Gort as Commander-in-Chief, British Expeditionary Force, on the outbreak of war, perhaps to put him at arm's length. This was the very post which the veteran General Ironside had confidently believed that he, himself, would receive and which he had even prepared himself for, but instead he had to be content with the War Office. This was, after all, promotion to the highest post in the British Army, but General Ironside was nonplussed. He was reported to have said subsequently of his appointment as C.I.G.S.:

"I should never have been sent there. I told Hore-Belisha at the time. I had never been at the War Office, didn't know a thing about it. I should have refused the appointment. But what else was there?" ^{77.}

Because of General Ironside's reluctant and possibly even incompetent approach to his new job, in which capacity there was also some friction between himself and the various Secretaries of State for War, it was

76. WO 166/1: op. cit., May 1940.

77. Divine, David: The Nine Days of Dunkirk, pp. 268-269, Faber and Faber, London, 1959.

decided in April 1940 to strengthen the War Office team by recalling General Sir John Dill from command of I Corps in France and establishing him as Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff. The post of Vice-Chief was a newly created one and was part of a design to relieve the three Service Chiefs of some of their heavy burden by setting up a supporting Vice-Chiefs of Staff Committee to deal with matters of less urgency, Vice-Admiral T. S. V. Phillips and Air Marshal R. E. C. Peirse being appointed respectively Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff and Vice-Chief of the Air Staff at the same time. General Dill took up his new appointment on 23rd April and quickly proved himself to be very competent. His opinions were already highly regarded and his undoubted capabilities in his new role were soon made obvious to all. Winston Churchill wrote:

"There was a very strong feeling in Cabinet and high military circles that the abilities and strategic knowledge of Sir John Dill should find their full scope in his appointment as our principal Army adviser. No one could doubt that his professional standing was in many ways superior to that of Ironside." 78.

General Ironside was apparently all too well aware of this feeling. He also saw that the post of Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, might very soon become one which would involve what he had long been seeking, control of active military operations, in spite of the apparent demotion. He had already turned his mind to the difficult question of the defence of the homeland. On 25th May, General Ironside wrote:

"I am now concentrating upon the Home Defence. The Cabinet are still wondering what they will do about appointing a Commander-in-Chief.... They want a change to some man well known in England. They are considering my appointment. I have said I am prepared to do what they want. Obviously, when one considers how the Germans have worked out their plans for conquest of all the other countries, they must have considered how to get at us. Parachutists, troop-carrying aeroplanes, tanks in flat-bottomed boats and the like. Given perhaps foggy weather, they might get a footing. The essence of the problem is information and instant action. Delay is fatal. Attack every body of men seen, irrespective of loss. Only extreme energy from the top will allow us to deal with this menace...." 79.

That very evening, as the B.E.F. appeared to be in increasingly dire straits and many were expecting that, barring a miracle, the final debacle could not be long delayed, General Ironside, anticipating the Cabinet's

78. Churchill, W. S.: Vol. II: Their Finest Hour, p. 64. Cassell, London, 1949.

79. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 25 May 1940 (Col. R. Macleod transcript).

feelings that his tenure as C.I.G.S. would be shortly terminated, put forward his suggestion to the Prime Minister. Winston Churchill described what happened:

"As the adverse battle drew to its climax, I and my colleagues greatly desired that Sir John Dill should become C.I.G.S.. We had also to choose a Commander-in-Chief for the British Island, if we were invaded. Late at night on May 25, Ironside, Dill, Ismay, myself, and one or two others in my room at Admiralty House, were trying to measure the position. General Ironside volunteered the proposal that he should cease to be C.I.G.S., but declared himself quite willing to command the British Home Forces. Considering the unpromising task that such a command was at the time thought to involve, this was a spirited and selfless offer. I therefore accepted General Ironside's proposal; and the high dignities and honours which were later conferred upon him arose from my appreciation of his bearing at this moment in our affairs. Sir John Dill became C.I.G.S. on May 27. The changes were generally judged appropriate for the time being." 80.

General Ironside was, in fact, very pleased that his suggestion was accepted, though he remained unhappy about the causes of the move. At last he had obtained what was not only, at least potentially, a fighting post, but was also one of enormous responsibility. Indeed, in view of the vital importance of defending the United Kingdom against invasion, his new post was perhaps, given the circumstances of the time, even more important in many ways than that of the job of C.I.G.S.. Certainly he was able to step down from the War Office and yet still retain his dignity. He wrote on 26th May:

".... I was told that I had to take over the command in England and organize that. I am to be made a Field Marshal later. Not at once, because the public may think that I am being given a sop and turned out. An honour for me and a new and most important job, one much more to my liking than C.I.G.S. in every way." 81.

The unfortunate General Kirke, however, became a victim of this high-level reshuffle. The top man, General Ironside, wanted his job and the Cabinet had agreed on the change, so General Kirke had little choice but to accept his fate, and this he did philosophically and without fuss, behaving with dignity like the good professional soldier he undoubtedly was. He later recalled that on 26th May:

80. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., p. 65.

81. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 26 May 1940, op. cit..

"I was told by the Secretary of State that the Cabinet had decided to put in Ironside as Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, my term being up on 31st June. Actually this was not so, as that date applied to my appointment as Inspector General. It is not worth arguing about, so I have let it go. I said that at this juncture the Cabinet must have people in whom they have complete confidence and that the interests of individuals did not count. If I was to be replaced, the sooner it was done the better, so that the new man could get firmly in the saddle. Eden thanked me and said of course I should receive pay to the end of my original appointment." 82.

General Kirke was fully aware of the circumstances that had led to General Ironside's ousting him from his job. He appeared, in fact, to find his successor less happy than Ironside had confided to his diary. General Ironside, though pleased with his new appointment, was obviously still considerably peeved at having been edged out of his previous high position. General Kirke continued his story:

"I returned to Kneller Hall and arranged to meet Ironside next day to hand over.

Ironside did this as C.I.G.S.. He is much upset at what he considers to be demotion, particularly as Trenchard, the Daily Sketch's nomination, had refused it.

I fancy it is 50% a desire to put Dill as C.I.G.S. and give Ironside an easy way out. Eden even offered him a baronetcy to sweeten the pill.

I drafted and issued my farewell message." 83.

Thus it was that General Sir Walter Kirke departed finally from the military stage and entered retirement, ending a long and distinguished Army career. His replacement was due to no obvious failure on his own part. He had performed his difficult task as Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, most credibly, considering the very limited resources placed at his disposal, due both to the poor state of Britain's overall preparedness for war and to the priority in all things of the needs of the B.E.F.. He had shown a sound and professional approach to the problems of defending the homeland. Up to 10th May he had regarded the invasion danger as being very slight and had correctly believed that the priority in equipment and trained manpower should lie with the B.E.F., since it was only on the Continent that the war could be fought and won. He had accepted that the resources allocated for Home

82. General Kirke Papers, op. cit.

83. ibid.

Defence, therefore, had of necessity to come a poor second and had even opposed keeping back Britain's only effective Armoured Division. Despite Churchill and others, he held firmly to his belief that only if the Dutch coastline fell would Britain be in any real danger from large-scale invasion and he saw his main task as being to train troops and formations as rapidly as possible for overseas service, while deploying just enough forces for his anti-invasion contingency plan, 'Julius Caesar', to ensure adequate security and keep the politicians happy.

With the opening of the German offensive on the West on 10th May, Holland very quickly fell and the Home Defence situation was transformed almost literally overnight. The invasion threat was suddenly greatly increased, though it was still not immediate. General Kirke now displayed drive and energy in adapting to the new situation, though he still privately doubted the occurrence of full-scale invasion and fought a running battle to moderate the more exaggerated demands of a Government obsessed by fears of sabotage, fifth columnists, and enemy paratroopers raining from the skies. Nevertheless, his considerable efforts, despite continuously meagre and often pitiful resources, in attempting to improve Home Defence by updating and reinforcing the 'Julius Caesar' Plan, were most commendable. His insistence that only a thin force should cover the beaches and that the emphasis should be on well defended ports, backed by strong mobile columns in reserve, combined with his opposition to tying up large numbers of troops in the static defence of airfields and other vulnerable points, beach obstacles and pillboxes, was to prove a superior approach to that of his successor as Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, General Ironside, and was more akin to that of the highly competent General Brooke, who took over the post later on. In May 1940, too, when the threat was much increased, General Kirke largely overcame the reluctance he had displayed during the early invasion scares and pressed with vigour for a host of other measures related to Home Defence to be rapidly implemented. He recalled, for example, that just a few days before his replacement the Chiefs of Staff Committee met:

".... to consider my requests for prohibited areas, internment of aliens, powers of arrest by the Army, immobilisation of ports, more labour and priority to be given to the Army by the Minister of Labour." 84.

84. General Kirke Papers, op. cit.

However, in spite of his efforts in this sphere, the clear-sighted General Kirke never ceased to regard the whole question of anti-invasion planning and preparations in the United Kingdom as a serious impediment to the task of Home Forces which he regarded as being the most important of all, that of training the Army to the highest standards in modern mobile warfare.

Writing later, General Kirke commented:

"The worst feature of all the invasion scares has been the stoppage of training for mobile warfare in favour of digging, wiring and general concentration on static defence.

The summer of 1940, which should have been devoted to the higher training of the Staff and troops, has been frittered away in creating obstacles and pillboxes." 85.

Why, then, did General Kirke have to be replaced as Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces? Without doubt, the main reason was that General Ironside badly wanted his job and, since Ironside was senior to him, General Kirke had little choice in the matter. Unfortunately, at 63, General Kirke was one of the more elderly generals, being three years older than Ironside. His term, too, was almost up and his successor was better known in the country as a whole, which was important for national morale at a critical time. The rapid and tumultuous events of 10th May 1940 and the following weeks created a climate of change at every level of high command, and the suddenly very real possibility that Home Forces might actually be forced to engage in active military operations gave rise to the feeling that there should be a new hand at the helm. His opposition to the idea of invasion earlier may have contributed to the lack of full confidence in him shown by the new War Cabinet and especially Churchill, who from the outset of the War had, rightly or wrongly, repeatedly and forcefully warned of the dangers of invasion.

What is certain, however, is that General Sir Walter Kirke was an important figure whose undoubted abilities have so far remained largely unrecorded by historians, having been overshadowed by succeeding Commanders-in-Chief, Home Forces. The fact remains that it was General Kirke who laid the foundations of Britain's planning and efforts to resist invasion on land in the Second World War, and it was he who initiated many ideas that were to be developed by his successors. He is a figure whose achievements deserve greater recognition by posterity.

85. General Kirke Papers, op. cit.

PART II: THE IRONSIDE PERIOD: 27 May 1940 - 20 July 1940

CHAPTER 5: "THE STATE OF THE ARMAMENT IS CATASTROPHIC"

General Sir William Edmund Ironside succeeded to the post of Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, on 27th May 1940. At the age of 60 he was only slightly younger than his predecessor. A tall, well built and very imposing figure, he was known as 'Tiny' to his colleagues. He was a veteran soldier with a long and distinguished career, having first tasted action as a young Royal Artillery subaltern in the Boer War of 1899-1902. Serving throughout the Great War of 1914-18, he had by its end risen to the rank of Brigadier-General with command of 99th Infantry Brigade. In October 1918 he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Allied troops operating from Archangel, in northern Russia, against the Bolsheviks. He held this post until October 1919 and soon became widely known as an aggressive and competent commander, displaying leadership, energy and common sense. He then commanded a British force in northern Persia from 1920 to 1921. Since that time, however, he had not seen any further active service, but had held a series of important posts, both at home and abroad. In 1922 he became Commandant of the Staff College, Camberley, until 1926 when he was given command of the 2nd Division at Aldershot. Then in 1928 he was sent to India as commander of the Meerut District until 1931, when he was posted back to England as Lieutenant of His Majesty's Tower of London. In 1933 he was sent back to India as Quarter-master General of India. Promoted to a full General in 1935, he returned home once more in 1936 to become General Officer, Commander-in-Chief Eastern Command. In 1938 he was posted abroad yet again as Governor and Commander-in-Chief, Gibraltar. As the war-clouds loomed, he was again recalled home, much to his relief, and received the newly created appointment of Inspector-General of Overseas Forces, in May 1939.

General Ironside's next appointment as Chief of the Imperial General Staff in September 1939, however, was to prove much more controversial. His campaign in northern Russia had given him a tremendous reputation before the War and his opinions carried a great deal of weight on its commencement. He had written a book about the German invasion of Poland in the First World War and he was regarded as a great authority on the subject. General Ironside, though somewhat reluctant, had been appointed to this top post by Mr. Hore-Belisha, the then Secretary of State for War. Hore-Belisha had earlier consulted the eminent military correspondent, Captain Basil H. Liddell Hart, and had requested him to draw up a list of the merits and failings of

character of a number of the leading Generals of the time, so as to help him assess their suitability to fill various posts. Liddell Hart had commented of General Ironside: "He had been the strongest of the lot [of Generals in 1939], but he had likewise suffered a deterioration with age." Liddell Hart recalled that Hore-Belisha had said to him that:

".... he had been impressed by my emphasis on Ironside's strength of personality and capacity as a trainer, in my notes. I agreed, while remarking that Ironside was also inclined to be intolerant and a 'Trade Unionist'. These defects might possibly be a cause of difficulties...." ¹.

By 'Trade Unionist' Liddell Hart meant, perhaps, that General Ironside was inclined to be clannish and would stick up for the requirements of the Army against the Secretary of State for War. Captain B. H. Liddell Hart's analysis was to be prophetic, since there was soon to be friction between the General and the Secretary of State, but, nevertheless, Hore-Belisha could see no others with General Ironside's drive and therefore proposed to the War Cabinet that General Ironside, though elderly, should take Lord Gort's place as Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Liddell Hart records that:

"Chamberlain and other members of the new War Cabinet, expressed doubts about Ironside's judgement and discretion, but with Churchill's support Hore-Belisha managed to persuade them to agree to Ironside being appointed." ².

General Ironside did in fact prove to be a poor choice for the post of Chief of the Imperial General Staff and he did not measure up to what was expected of him. He was perhaps slightly past his prime and was never happy in what he regarded as being a 'desk job'. His judgement, too, could be suspect, as illustrated, for example, by an address he made to the assembled officers at the Staff College, Camberley, just one month before the opening of the German offensive on 10th May, in which he said: "The one thing I want the Germans to do in France is to attack us!" ³.

Summing up his time as Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Ironside wrote that it was:

1. Liddell Hart, Captain B. H.: Memoirs, Vol. II, pp. 238-239, Cassell, London, 1965.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 240 & 261.

3. Interview with Lt.Gen. Sir William Pike, 18 Aug. 1981.

".... intensely interesting, but marred by too many committees and too much explanation to all and sundry. Military decisions delayed, or criticized and weakened, before they can be executed. One's own decision feels weakened by the amount of talk to which it is subjected. It is bad enough to have three Chiefs of Staff to settle something, but when their hard-earned decision is subject to committee rulings, the running of war is well-nigh impossible....

The real vice of the military position was its complete subjugation to civilian control, almost in detail. The Cabinet assumed a predominant position in the direction of military affairs and kept the military leaders so much on the run that they never had time to think and plan. We were always hurrying along with explanations and justifications of what we wanted. Too many cooks at the boiling of the broth. Anyway, as far as I am concerned, there is an end of that phase. I never had to work so hard in my life before, and never had the sense of futility so strongly before."

Referring to his new appointment, he went on:

"Now I start another phase. I must confess that it is much more in my line than the other. I am now in command and am not hampered by a machine that was made for peace conditions and was not fit to function in war. I wonder how much more the civil side will fall into my hands." 4.

The post of Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, indeed looked, on the face of it, a much more suitable appointment for General Ironside and it was certainly one in which he felt far more happy. His powerful personality, inspiring character, his drive and energy, his fighting spirit, his excellent pre-War reputation, the fact that he was widely known in the country as a whole and had proved during the last few months that he could keep his head in a crisis, and, above all, his keenness for an active field command, were all attributes in his favour and the War Cabinet felt that he would infuse more drive and purpose into the defence preparations. It was thought, too, that he would be fully capable of shouldering the immense responsibility of actually having to lead the ill-trained, ill-equipped and totally inadequate forces then remaining in the United Kingdom into a real battle, as seemed increasingly likely - truly an unpromising and thankless task at this time! Unfortunately, though, for his prospects of success in this task, he had seen no active service for nearly twenty years and, due to his previous post as Chief of the Imperial General Staff, had missed out on the bitter, but invaluable first-hand experiences of modern warfare gained, very much the hard way, by his more junior colleagues in April and May 1940 in Norway, Belgium and France. He was thus to adopt a somewhat

4. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 27 May 1940. (Col. R. Macleod transcript.)

outmoded approach to the problems posed by this new type of warfare. Indeed, as it turned out, his time as Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, was to be surprisingly brief and no less controversial than his previous appointment.

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How General Ironside would make out was as yet unknown when he took up his new post. He arrived at the Headquarters of Home Forces at Kneller Hall, Twickenham, on 27th May, in a cheery, but determined, mood:

".... I am at one more job. I always seem to get the tail-end of things to pull them together. Kneller Hall [is] the most awful Victorian country-house. Very different to being in London. A lovely summer's day with green grass all round us and a comfortable little mess that has been made up a few days ago. Kirke said goodbye and went off. He has been placed on retired pay and was very sorry to go, poor chap.... He has done a lot, but has been hampered by people not taking the defence of England seriously. Now they do, which will make it much more easy for me. It is always better to take over something on the up-grade." 5.

General Ironside was shortly to be given much greater powers than his predecessor. On the day of his becoming Commander-in-Chief, 'Headquarters, Home Forces' was upgraded to the status of a General Headquarters in the field and was subsequently to be known as 'General Headquarters, Home Forces'. His staff was gradually enlarged and the able Major-General Bernard C. T. Paget, just returned from Norway, was appointed Chief of the General Staff, G.H.Q. Home Forces, and as such was to become General Ironside's right-hand man. Previously the organisation of Home Defence had been centralized on the War Office. The C.-in-C., Home Forces, had had command of the bulk of troops in Great Britain, his main duties being the preparation of plans to deal with invasion, operational control of all troops in the country except special formations nominated by the War Office and AA. Command, executive control of all measures for the provision of military protection at Vulnerable Points, and command and training of the Home Defence Battalions. All administrative arrangements, such as quartering, movements, training of regular Army personnel, etc., were, however, in the hands of the War Office, while Northern Ireland District was directly responsible to the War Office on all matters, and the Orkney and

5. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 27 May 1940, op. cit.

Shetland Area was under the operational control of an Admiral, though administratively under Scottish Command. Various committees had dealt with certain aspects of policy, the chief of these being the Inter Services Port Defence Sub-Committee, which dealt with coastal defence, the Deputy Chiefs of Staff (Anti-Aircraft) Sub-Committee, which dealt with Anti-Aircraft defence at home, and the Deputy Chiefs of Staff (Vulnerable Points) Sub-Committee, which covered defence arrangements for Vulnerable Points. ⁶.

All this was now changed, however. New instructions defining the Commander-in-Chief's increased powers were forwarded to him on 6th June by order of the Army Council. These read as follows:

"1. The C.-in-C., Home Forces, exercises complete operational control over all military forces in the United Kingdom except such as may from time to time be withdrawn from his command by the Army Council, and Anti-Aircraft formations, which will remain under the operational control of the Air Ministry.

Transportation troops will, however, be held in Reserve under War Office control.

Training units and establishments may be included in the defence plans of the C.-in-C., Home Forces, and may be ordered to carry out any necessary reconnaissances or rehearsals, but they will not be given any operational duties which interfere with their training till an emergency arises. If such units have an operational role, they will not be moved without the concurrence of the C.-in-C., Home Forces."

The existing machinery and organisation was to be retained for the administrative requirements of the C.-in-C., Home Forces. However, requirements on administrative matters which affected operations and the defence of the country were to be met differently:

- "(a) Those which fall within the normal competence and power of the Commands will be dealt with direct between G.H.Q. and the Commands.
- (b) Those which fall outside the normal competence and powers of the Commands will be referred by G.H.Q. to the War Office, where they will be dealt with in conformity with the policy of His Majesty's Government." ⁷.

6. CAB 106/1202: Memoranda Prepared for a Secret Session of the House of Commons on Home Defence: Paper A, Organisation and Responsibilities of the C.-in-C., Home Forces, 11 June 1940.

7. *ibid.*: 79/Mob/3149, Instructions for the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, 6 June 1940.

The Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, could already ensure that his wishes were brought at once to the notice of the Government Departments concerned through the machinery of the Home Defence Executive, of which he was chairman. On 28th May the War Cabinet approved that this body should be strengthened on the civilian side by the addition of a second representative of the Ministry of Home Security, a representative of the Ministry of Transport and a senior Civil Servant, Sir Findlater Stewart, who would represent the civil power as a whole. The Executive would now be better able to give direction on all matters which were the responsibility of the Civil Departments and was no longer responsible to the Chiefs of Staff, though it would still receive direction from them on military matters. If a ruling were required on a matter of policy or in the event of a difference of opinion between the Services and Civil sides of the organisation, reference would be made firstly to the Secretary of State for War and the Minister of Home Security in consultation and, in the final resort, to the War Cabinet.⁸

The Lord President of the Council, who proposed these changes, hoped that the Home Defence Executive could now, without reference to any other authority, deal speedily and efficiently with most of the problems arising in anti-invasion planning and preparations before an attack. However, this large and cumbersome body was no way to get quick decisions in an emergency. General Ironside referred to it as "a debating society", while the Chiefs of Staff considered that it was:

".... too unwieldy as an instrument for the conduct of active operations, which must be under the general direction of one man armed with the necessary powers, and served by a small staff."

If an attack took place, therefore, the Chiefs of Staff proposed that General Ironside should have beside him on his staff his own Chief of the General Staff, a Naval Staff Officer (a Rear Admiral), an Air Staff Officer (an Air Vice Marshal) and a Chief Civil Staff Officer, who would be Sir Findlater Stewart. This small group:

".... would keep the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, fully informed of the state and availability of the forces, and conversely would convey the requirements of the Commander-in-Chief to the Admiralty, the Air Officers Commanding-in-Chief and to the Civil Departments."

8. CAB 65/7 WM(40)144th:8, 28 May 1940; and CAB 66/8 WP(40)173, The Home Defence Executive: Memorandum by the Lord President of the Council, 27 May 1940.

The Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, would, with this small staff and a few junior staff officers, operate from an Advanced Headquarters situated in the Cabinet War Room. In the event of a conflict between military necessity and constitutional rights or civil interests, the Commander-in-Chief would be given direct access to the Prime Minister, to whom the advice of the Chiefs of Staff would be available. Until active operations actually began, however, the Home Defence Executive would continue as at present. This sensible arrangement would, the Chiefs of Staff believed, "provide the best means which can be rapidly devised for ensuring the unified control of all measures for the defence of this country", and it was readily approved by the War Cabinet on 29th May. ⁹.

In addition, a Home Defence (Security) Executive was formed under the chairmanship of Lord Swinton with representatives from Home Forces, the Home Office, M.I.5 and Special Intelligence Section. This highly confidential body was linked to the Home Defence Executive by a common staff and its duty was to consider questions relating to defence against the Fifth Column and to take immediate action.

In the event of communications between the Government in London and the Provinces being cut by air raids or sabotage, the Regional Commissioners' Organisation, which consisted of twelve local representatives of the Central Government who were responsible to the Ministry of Home Security and each had their own staffs containing representatives from the various Whitehall Departments, was already designed to carry on, in close collaboration with the G.O. C.-in-C.'s of the Command concerned, the functions of Government. In the event of invasion, however, the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, or the G.O. C.-in-C.'s of Commands, or Officers Commanding Areas, acting for him, could proclaim martial law as soon as the course of the invasion rendered it impossible for the civil power to carry on with its judicial and executive functions. The military commander could then assume complete control, but would normally still use the local Regional Commissioner's staff and organisation to help him. ¹⁰.

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9. CAB 65/7 WM(40)146th:15, 29 May 1940; and CAB 66/8 WP(40)177 (also COS(40)405), Home Defence, Conduct of Operations: Report by the COS Committee, 28 May 1940.

10. CAB 106/1202: op. cit.: Paper B, Note for the Secretary of State for War on the Powers of the C.-in-C., Home Forces, 11 June 1940.

The threat of invasion, meanwhile, appeared to be growing daily more alarming. On 28th May, Neville Chamberlain, Lord President of the Council, warned the War Cabinet that various recent indications pointed to the fact that "a German move from Norway was impending". He added that, "there had been reports of troop movements from east to west in Southern Norway and neutral missions in Berlin and Oslo had been stopped from sending cypher messages since 24th May", and suggested that "special attention must be given at this time to Norway" since "the Germans might perhaps be intending a raid on Scotland". The First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, however, said that he "did not think a seaborne expedition was practicable, although there was, of course, the chance that, if the Germans were willing to take the risk, it might slip through in bad visibility." The First Lord of the Admiralty, A. V. Alexander, was also sceptical about the possibility, pointing out that air reconnaissances on the previous day had found nothing in the Norwegian fjords "except two ships".¹¹ The following day, too, the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Cyril Newall, attempted to reassure the War Cabinet that:

".... the Chiefs of Staff thought that an airborne expedition based on Norway was only likely as part of a full-scale German invasion of the British Isles. A seaborne expedition from Norway alone was still more improbable, particularly during the summer months. Arrangements were, however, being made for reconnaissance to be maintained to guard against the possibility of a German expedition being directed from Norway against this country." ¹².

The main problem was simply the lack of effective sources of intelligence combined with sketchy reconnaissance at a time when the evacuations of British troops from Norway and France were in full swing and rumours and 'sightings' of Fifth Columnists were rife in the country. Any reports of unusual activity by the enemy that might just conceivably indicate that an invasion was in preparation often became exaggerated and blown up out of all proportion. After all, the Germans had obviously planned the swift and devastating invasions of Poland, of Denmark and Norway, and of the Low Countries and France, in the greatest of detail, so there seemed little reason for Britons to doubt that the enemy had not already planned an equally swift and devastating descent by air and sea on the weakened forces remaining in the United Kingdom. It was only after the War that it was learned that the Germans had, in fact, hardly even considered, let alone planned for, such a possibility as early as May or June of 1940. Winston Churchill called it "the veil of the Unknown". After the War, he wrote:

11. CAB 65/7 WM(40)144th:5, 28 May 1940.

12. CAB 65/7 WM(40)146th:7, 29 May 1940.

"Now in the full light of the after-time it is easy to see where we were ignorant or too much alarmed, where we were careless or clumsy. Twice in two months we had been taken completely by surprise. The overrunning of Norway and the break-through at Sedon, with all that followed from these, proved the deadly power of the German initiative. What else had they got ready-prepared and organised to the last inch? Would they suddenly pounce out of the blue with new weapons, perfect planning, and overwhelming force upon our almost totally unequipped and disarmed Island at any one of a dozen or score of possible landing places? Or would they go to Ireland? He would have been a very foolish man who allowed his reasoning, however clean-cut and seemingly sure, to blot out any possibility against which provision could be made." ¹³.

In Britain, at the time, the dangers appeared to be increasingly acute. On 29th May the Chiefs of Staff approved that the R.A.F. should institute a Dawn Patrol forthwith, to cover the coast from Sheringham to Newhaven, and decided to draw the attention of the War Cabinet to the "imminent danger" of a seaborne and airborne invasion and to impress on them the urgent necessity for preparing, not only the armed forces, but the whole country, to meet it. ¹⁴. Their report, placed before the War Cabinet the very next day, 30th May, stated that, "in our view it is highly probable that Germany is now setting the stage for delivering a full-scale attack on England." The Chiefs of Staff considered that with the French Army unable, in the near future, to mount a resolute counterattack on a sufficiently large scale to keep the German Army and Airforce fully extended, the Germans, rather than concentrating their attention on destroying the French Army and eliminating France from the War at an early stage, might well "stabilize the front in France for the moment on approximately the present lines and concentrate on a major attack against Great Britain." They held the belief that, "the British Empire is Germany's main enemy and if she can defeat us, the subsequent capitulation of France follows as a matter of course." The Chiefs of Staff went on to say that they had recently received reports of a new form of attack that had not hitherto been seriously considered:

"We think it possible that the Germans might employ a large fleet of fast motorboats (possibly up to 200), carrying 100 men apiece, to carry out a seaborne raid on a large scale. The boats could be assembled without undue evidence at a number of ports in Germany and possibly in Holland. They could make the passage of the sea during the dark hours.

These boats would be handled with the utmost boldness and would probably be run up on the beaches without regard to loss of the craft or casualties to the personnel. By this means we consider that a considerable force of the enemy could be landed at many points on the coast simultaneously with airborne raids inland. We do not consider that by naval or air action we could prevent such a landing."

13. Churchill, W. S.: Vol. II, Their Finest Hour, p. 143, Cassell, London, 1949.

14. CAB 79/4 COS(40)158th:1, 29 May 1940.

They continued with a stern warning:

"In our view it would not be right to assume that the Germans will take their time about preparing to launch the attack.

The late Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, asked us to inform him when the Chiefs of Staff considered an attack was imminent. We think that General Ironside should be so informed now." 15.

Indeed, such an attack, following hard on the heels of the Dunkirk withdrawal, would have had a good chance of making land without effective interference, especially at night or in weather conditions of limited visibility or if German air superiority prevented reasonable air reconnaissance, because the Royal Navy did not have nearly enough destroyers or patrol craft to cover the whole East Coast from the Wash to Sussex, the local seaward defences of estuaries were not yet proof against light surface craft, the fixed defences were weak and the beaches were still largely unobstructed. Moreover, if the enemy did obtain air superiority they might be able to guard their lines of communications against the Royal Navy and enable a mere raiding force to procure a bridgehead through which a full-scale invasion might be launched. The Admiralty, in an Appreciation the same day, forecast that the Germans would employ their maximum effort and would accept almost catastrophic losses, making the best possible use of airpower, Fifth Column and armoured vehicles in the first wave. They stated that, "the success or failure of the first wave would decide whether the enterprise ever reached the scale of an invasion," while the Chiefs of Staff noted, "We have ample evidence of the difficulty of dislodging the German once he has established himself on enemy soil." 16.

The Chiefs of Staff concluded their report by advising the War Cabinet that, "the Country should be warned and roused to the imminent danger," and emphasizing the importance of defending the beaches and denying the enemy a lodgement they urged that, "all labour facilities required to put the beaches on the Yorkshire Coast, in East Anglia, and on the South-East and South Coasts as far as Newhaven in a state of defence should be mobilized and the necessary work put in hand without a moment's delay." They had already

15. CAB 66/8 WP(40)178 (also COS(40)406), Invasion of the United Kingdom: Report by the COS Committee, 29 May 1940.

16. Collier, Basil: History of the Second World War: The Defence of the United Kingdom, p. 123, H.M.S.O., London, 1957; and CAB 44/47 Admiralty M.010329, 29 May 1940.

instructed the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, to review his dispositions in the light of this new form of attack, and that, "the Army at home should be brought to a high degree of alertness, particularly at night." 17.

The War Cabinet approved the Chiefs of Staff's recommendations and immediately took steps to see that measures to procure sufficient labour and to warn the Country of the dangers were put into hand. Submarine and trawler patrols had already been instituted and the coast watching service had been recently greatly strengthened, while the production of anti-tank beach mines would begin in a week's time, at first only at the rate of 10,000 a week, though this was expected to rise soon to 20,000 a week, still a painfully small output considering the vast stretches of beach to be mined. The Chief of Staff's conception of a large-scale seaborne expedition embarked in a flotilla of fast motorboats, however, like the invasion threat envisaged from Norway, was based on the slenderest of evidence and much was left to the imagination. At the War Cabinet meeting that day, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound said there were merely "indications" that motorboats had been collected at Bremen and Hamburg, and that while the Germans were known to have an organised force of ships at Vigo, "it might also be significant that the Germans had left one particular stretch opposite our coast clear of mines." This was hardly overwhelming evidence and, at the meeting, the Prime Minister said he "doubted whether a raid on a large-scale could be carried out by fast motorboats", because to put enough men ashore they would have to come over in large flotillas which would be far more liable to detection and interception by the Royal Navy on the high seas. It also emerged from the discussion that "there was some doubt as to the precise number of motorboats which the Germans possessed", though "they could be fairly quickly constructed". Stretching their imagination somewhat, the War Cabinet also envisaged that they would be fitted "with the aerophane type of engine" and that, if concentrations of the craft were present in German or Dutch harbours, they might be "readily disguised against air reconnaissances as barges"! 18.

Nevertheless, in the desperate days during and immediately following the Dunkirk evacuation, such fears seemed all too real and in any case undue risks could not be taken. All measures to ensure the security, and indeed the survival of the Home Base were of paramount importance, however desperate. The

17. CAB 66/8 WP(40)178 (also COS(40)406), Invasion of the United Kingdom: Report by the COS Committee, 29 May 1940.

18. CAB 65/7 WM(40)148th:10, 30 May 1940.

Prime Minister even went so far as to say that, in the last resort:

".... we should not hesitate to contaminate our beaches with gas, if this course would be to our advantage. We had the right to do what we liked with our own territory." 19.

General Ironside, while acknowledging the dangers posed by a seaborne invasion using motorboats combined with an airborne landing and agreeing with the need to improve defensive preparations with all haste, himself doubted that an attack on the United Kingdom was "imminent" at that time. He believed that to complete the destruction of France would be Germany's immediate priority. On 30th May, the same day as the War Cabinet considered the Chiefs of Staff's warning, he mused:

"What will the German do now? Will he turn on the French, or will he have a go at us in this country? The soft spot is undoubtedly the French. They wouldn't take much finishing off. To get control of England would finish the War completely, but I fancy he will make his preparations most carefully before he tackles us. That must take him time, even if he has begun his preparations already. After all, he may well try to finish us off by air-attack alone. He evidently wants to finish it straight away.... I should say that there will be a respite for the Germans to lick their mechanical sores and then the avalanche.... Personally, I think that the Germans are more likely to finish up the French than to go straight for us. They usually finish what they have put their hand to. At the moment I do not think we are in any immediate danger - 14 days." 20.

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General Ironside lost no time in setting to work with a will, for much had to be accomplished in the space of a very few weeks if the Nation were to survive. On 30th May, following the Chiefs of Staff's instruction, he accordingly increased the state of readiness of Home Forces by issuing orders to all Commands for "all defences to be manned during darkness and all steps to be taken to resist an imminent invasion by sea and air". By 3rd June, the reconnaissance of all beaches on the East, South East and South Coasts to determine those suitable for the landing of troops and vehicles had been completed between Fraserburgh and Southampton, and work on the defences of the most vulnerable of these was being "accelerated to the utmost", especially on the Yorkshire, East Anglian, South East and South Coasts. The same day,

19. CAB 65/7 WM(40)148th:10, 30 May 1940.

20. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 30 May 1940, op. cit.

General Ironside, bearing in mind the possibility that the Germans might even seize Ireland as a base, so that "our West Coast ports, particularly Liverpool and Bristol, and aerodromes in the West are as exposed to attack by airborne troops as those on the East Coast", and because of the danger this would pose to essential supplies, these ports "should have the same priority for defence purposes", issued orders to Southern and Western Commands for the extension of the reconnaissance to include beaches from Southampton to the Solway Firth.^{21.}

The construction of static defences was already making good progress. On 4th June, General Ironside was able to report to the War Cabinet that:

"In all Commands, preparations for defence against airborne and seaborne attack are proceeding as rapidly as possible. Civil contractors are in very close touch with Chief Engineers of all Commands and, through the latter, with experienced R.E. officers who are supervising work now being undertaken. A specially qualified senior R.E. officer is attached to G.H.Q. as an Inspector to ensure that work is quickly and efficiently done."

By this date work was already well advanced on the construction of pillboxes and wiring on many of the beaches which were considered most likely for the landing of troops and vehicles, though on many others, revealed by the reconnaissance on the East, South East and South Coasts, work was just beginning. Contracts had been placed for concrete anti-tank obstacles, but few had yet been positioned. A supply of beach lighting sets had been arranged for. A total of 50,000 anti-tank mines had already been issued and a further 200,000 had been ordered. A reconnaissance of beaches was soon to be carried out in Northern Ireland. Every possible landing ground in the Metropolitan Area had been reconnoitred and work on many such grounds to render them unusable had been completed. Contracts had been made and work started "on 90% of possible landing grounds within five miles' radius of certain specified ports between Yarmouth and Newhaven and on 40% of such grounds between the Tyne and the Humber", and also on similar areas in Scottish and Southern Commands. The Air Ministry had begun similar work on possible landing grounds within five miles of all aerodromes in the Eastern Counties, though this would obviously be an immense task. Preparations to immobilize facilities at all ports on the East and South Coasts from Peterhead to Newhaven were in preparation. The blocking of port areas from landward attack was also progressing with preparations for the demolition of bridges on roads providing egress from

21. WO 166/1: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, G.H.Q. Home Forces, May & June, 1940; and CAB 80/12 COS(40)417: Forces for the Defence of the United Kingdom, Memoranda by the C.-in-C., Home Forces, 31 May 1940.

selected ports on the East Coast from Aberdeenshire to Kent being 90% completed, while temporary roadblocks on these roads were 80% completed. Roadblocks were springing up in every Command, the policy in the case of ports being to ensure that access was barred to any enemy who might have landed on neighbouring beaches or from the air, and also to ensure that areas occupied by troops could not be rushed without any warning. Elsewhere, the main roads would be kept free for our own troops, possible enemy movements being prevented by artillery. Obstacles were being provided on side-roads to hold up enemy vehicles, while strong points were to be made in villages. The roadblocks were still being made with any improvised material that was to hand, and Dannert concertina wire was also being used. Defensive posts were being prepared for the guards of these blocks, since they were useless unless covered by fire. In addition and in close conjunction with the Ministry of Transport, many stretches of wide arterial roads, on which hostile aircraft might land, were being rendered unusable for this purpose "by the erection of upright posts with wire stretched between them or by blocks on alternate sides of the road some 300 yards apart". In short, rapid progress had been made in a matter of less than a month. However, most preparations were still very improvised and were often hastily planned, flimsy and poorly sited, while a vast amount of work remained to be done. ²².

Some progress, too, had been made with strengthening the fixed defences. General Ironside's report stated that 47 emergency beach batteries, each of two 6" guns, were being installed on the East Coast for seaward defence. These, however, would have to cover a coastline which stretched from Amble in Northumberland to Newhaven in Sussex and only 16 of these were ready on 4th June. Further 6" guns for port defence, together with 3" and 4" guns, had been installed on Tyneside, Humberside, and at Lowestoft and Harwich, but another 50 guns of various calibres from 4" to 6", which it was planned would be sited mainly on the West Coast and in Northern Ireland, had yet to have their emplacements constructed before they could be installed. Progress was also being made with improvised anti-tank measures and with arming the Local Defence Volunteers. ²³ Despite the seriousness of the true situation, General Ironside attempted to put on a brave face to the War Cabinet and had

22. WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940. Appendix A: Memorandum by C.-in-C., Home Forces, 4 June 1940 (also CAB 66/8 WP(40)194); and CAB 65/7 WM (40)154th:10, 4 June 1940.

23. WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940. Appendix A: op. cit., 4 June 1940 (also CAB 66/8 WP(40)194).

couched his report in confident tones. He recalled at that meeting:

"I appeared in front of the Cabinet and gave them an account of what we have been doing towards meeting an invasion. Anthony Eden told me afterwards that they were all very happy that I was there, and felt that something was being done...." 24.

The War Cabinet seemed satisfied, but these measures, however credible, still represented in early June something of a drop in the ocean.

The task before General Ironside, of defending the British homeland against an invasion threat that seemed increasingly likely to materialize at any time, was clearly going to be a very formidable one indeed. The dispositions of Home Forces at the beginning of June were essentially those of the updated 'Julius Caesar' Plan and had changed little since General Kirke had made his alterations in the middle of May. (See Map 5.) Now, including the 38th (Welsh) and the 61st (S. Midland) Divisions, which were still disposed in a training role in Western and Southern Commands respectively, General Ironside had 15 Infantry divisions, totalling about 170,000 men, and the weak and incomplete 2nd Armoured Division at his disposal. There were also 57 Home Defence Battalions, many of which were employed on the defence of vulnerable points, as yet only 18 Holding Battalions, and some 140,000 men in training centres and training units, plus 300,000 newly enrolled, untrained and largely unarmed Local Defence Volunteers, and the troops manning the coastal defences. Not available to General Ironside were the troops of A.D.G.B., the 53rd (Welsh) Division in Northern Ireland and the two brigades of the 49th (W. Riding) Division, which was reforming having just returned from Norway (its third brigade had been sent to secure Iceland). With these meagre forces he had to guard the whole of Great Britain against the dual threat posed by seaborne forces that might land anywhere along the East Anglian or South East Coasts, or even further afield, and airborne troops that could land almost literally anywhere. Eight of the 15 Infantry divisions available to him, the 45th (West Country) and 1st London in Sussex and Kent, the 15th (Scottish), 55th (W. Lancashire) and 18th (East Anglian) in East Anglia, the 66th (Lancashire and Borders) in Yorkshire, the 54th (East Anglian) in Durham and Northumberland, and the 9th (Scottish) in Scotland, had "the primary role of coast defence with their rear elements disposed to deal with airborne attack". In Command Reserve were the 2nd London Division

24. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 4 June 1940, op. cit.

and 20th Armoured Brigade in Eastern Command, and the 59th (Staffordshire) Division, which were within supporting distance of the coastal divisions in East Anglia and north of the Humber, respectively, while 2nd Armoured Division guarded Lincolnshire in Northern Command. The two divisions still in a purely training role, 38th (Welsh) and 61st (S. Midland) could now be called upon by General Ironside in an emergency. Finally, the IV Corps, which was reaffirmed as G.H.Q. Reserve on 3rd June and consisted of 1st Canadian, 43rd (Wessex) and 52nd (Lowland) Divisions in the area Northampton-North London-Aldershot, was "suitably disposed to move rapidly by brigade group to any threatened area between The Wash and Southampton, a coastline of about 400 miles".²⁵ (See Map 5.)

These dispositions, which General Ironside had inherited from his predecessor, appeared on the face of it fairly sound, but a closer examination, especially bearing in mind the new form of attack envisaged by the Chiefs of Staff, reveals that there were grave flaws. General Ironside wrote on 31st May:

"A large proportion of this force is as yet insufficiently trained and provided with artillery and A.F.V.'s to undertake offensive operations, and must therefore act on the defensive in prepared positions." ²⁶

The standard of mobility and training, indeed, left much to be desired. The eight Infantry divisions on the coast, five of which were insufficiently trained second-line Territorial Divisions, in fact had little choice but to act on the defensive, since they were in any case largely immobile, while the supporting formations, also mainly second-line Territorial units, were little better off. Transport in general was provided only for supplies and certain details such as field artillery units, and most troops, if ordered to move faster than they could march, would have to do so in hired motor coaches driven by civilians who were completely unprepared for battlefield conditions. In most cases, the vehicles and drivers were to be assembled at "short notice" which meant at least eight hours would elapse before the troops could start. Thus even quite small landing parties, especially if supported by A.F.V.'s, might do irreparable harm before being rounded up.²⁷ The coastal divisions,

25. CAB 80/12 COS(40)417 (also CRHF 1/1074/5(6)): Forces for the Defence of the United Kingdom, Memorandum by the C.-in-C., Home Forces, 31 May 1940.

26. *ibid.*

27. Collier, Basil: *op. cit.*, p. 124.

too, already overstretched, would be even more so by having to dispose troops not only to guard against the threat of a seaborne landing over, as yet, almost unobstructed beaches, but also to counter any airborne attack on their rear. Most of these divisions consisted chiefly of semi-trained riflemen and, in addition, many of the troops were employed on frantically digging and sand-bagging static defence works, which left little time for essential elements of training, such as taking part in exercises or practising firing weapons. The standard of training and expertise among the Territorial officers and N.C.O.'s was appallingly low. Also the severe shortage of adequately trained troops coming from training units, coupled with the demands of the B.E.F., meant that most of these infantry divisions averaged little over 50% of their 15,500 man establishment. The numbers were soon to be made up by taking 7,000 men from the Holding Battalions, by increasing the 18 Holding Battalions to 30, so as to hold a further 15,000 men, and by generally taking measures to speed the flow of trained men coming from the Infantry Training Centres. By these measures it was hoped to have a total of 60,000 infantry available as riflemen in the shortest possible time. Most of the additions actually reaching the fighting formations, however, would be recruits with little more than four months' training. 28.

Even the relatively well-equipped, trained and mobile IV Corps in G.H.Q. Reserve was inadequate for its important task. It was expected to have to intervene "by infantry brigade groups or, exceptionally, as a Corps" at one or more points anywhere within a vast radius, moving "by day or night". This could create enormous problems of co-ordination and control. Indeed, it was ordered on 5th June to "arrange for the reconnaissance of routes to Home Counties, East Anglia, Humber and Lancashire areas", to practise the necessary troop movements by road and to arrange for the reconnaissance of aerodromes. A simultaneous enemy landing, for example, in both East Anglia and Kent, would necessitate the Corps to attempt to conduct operations on two fronts, in this case both north and south of the difficult barrier to movement presented by the River Thames, or, more likely, to have a large proportion of its strength decentralised to Commands to be frittered away in penny packets rather than used in a crushing blow. Not only this, but on 3rd June and 5th June, respectively, 52nd (Lowland) Division and 1st Canadian Division received preparatory orders to move overseas at an early date, and were

28. CAB 66/8 WP(40)182: Manpower for Home Defence: Memorandum for Secretary of State for War by the War Office, 30 May 1940.

immediately placed under War Office control, temporarily leaving 43rd (Wessex) as the sole division in G.H.Q. Reserve.²⁹

The greatest problem of all, however, remained that of the acute shortage of almost all types of equipment. (See Appendices 5 & 6.) The equipment situation for Home Forces at the beginning of June had, in fact, marginally improved since 22nd May, due to the emphasis shifting from reinforcing the B.E.F., to attempting to evacuate it from France and Norway. Thus, equipment from new production was supplied to Home Forces, rather than sending it overseas straightaway. The increase in equipment was also due to further units, mainly artillery Field Regiments, being put at General Ironside's disposal for home defence. Thus, the number of 25 pdrs., or 18/25 pdrs., available in the hands of troops for Home Defence, had increased from 85 on 22nd May to no less than 295 on 31st May, the number of 18 pdrs. from 52 to 110, and the number of 4.5" howitzers from 107 to 193. This gave a grand total of 598 field guns available on 31st May, compared to only 244 on 22nd May, which was quite a significant increase. There were also over 200 more field guns in depots, with training units and at practice camps, and 101 medium and perhaps about 40 mobile heavy guns in the Country. Nevertheless, only the three divisions of IV Corps were in the course of completion to their full establishment of 72 field guns, and this was not a measure for Home Defence, but was, in fact, preparatory to sending them abroad! Thus, on 31st May, both the 1st Canadian and 43rd (Wessex) Divisions had 48 x 25 pdrs., while the 52nd (Lowland) Division had, as yet, only 16. The rest of the Home Defence divisions were still very short of field artillery, having between 8 and 30 field guns apiece, well under half their proper establishment, while most of these were the outdated 18 pdr. or 4.5" howitzer, instead of the modern 25 pdr.. Only the 49th (W. Riding) Division, freshly returned from Norway, had its full complement of 72 x 25 pdrs.. (See Appendix 6.) Not only this, but ammunition for all types of field guns was also in very short supply.

The anti-tank gun position was even worse. (See Appendices 5 and 6.) For similar reasons there were, on 31st May, 122 x 2 pdr. anti-tank guns available for Home Defence, compared with only 33 on 22nd May, but, again, only the three divisions of G.H.Q. Reserve had anything even approaching their full establishment of 48 guns each. The 1st Canadian Division had 36,

29. WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940. Appendix B: G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 1, 5 June 1940.

43rd (Wessex) Division had only 8, and 52nd (Lowland) Division had 12, while the independent 58th Anti-Tank Regiment at Aldershot had only two complete batteries of 12 x 2 pdrs., instead of its usual four batteries. All the other divisions available to General Ironside had between two and eight 2 pdr. anti-tank guns, at most one sixth of their proper establishment, except the 59th (Staffordshire) Division, 18th (East Anglian) Division in Norfolk and 1st London Division in the vital Kent salient which still possessed no anti-tank guns whatsoever!

To stop the German tanks, therefore, the defenders would have to rely chiefly on the relatively ineffective .55" Boys anti-tank rifle. (See Appendix 6.) However, apart from the 9th (Scottish) and the three G.H.Q. Reserve divisions which had their full establishment of 307 of these, and two other divisions which had 154 each, the majority of divisions on 31st May had at most 47 Boys anti-tank rifles, less than a sixth of establishment, while ammunition for these also was in critically short supply. Few divisions, except those in G.H.Q. Reserve, too, had their full quota of 90 Bren Carriers and some had none at all, and while most divisions had their full establishment of 590 Bren light machine-guns, there was a shortage of Vickers heavy machine-guns and an even worse one of 3" mortars. There were only an average of 3,000 Mills bombs per division and, although most divisions were up to establishment in 2" mortars, there were only about 20 rounds per gun! ^{30.}

The tank position, too, had improved but little since the middle of May. (See Appendix 7.) According to a statement furnished by the War Office in May 1947 which is quoted in the Official History, there were on 1st June 1940 some 963 tanks in the United Kingdom, comprising 110 infantry tanks, 103 Cruisers, 618 light tanks and 132 obsolete 'medium' tanks. ^{31.} In actual fact, this presents a very misleading picture, since it includes some 300 tanks in depots and training units, and perhaps 130 obsolescent light tanks, as well as the 132 old mediums, which were totally unfit for modern warfare and were probably best employed as static pillboxes. All the 103 Cruiser tanks, for example, were either in depots being completed or repaired, or being used in training schools, and none of these had yet been issued to

30. CAB 80/12 COS(40)417 (also CREF 1/1074/5(6)): Forces for the Defence of the United Kingdom, Memorandum by the C.-in-C., Home Forces, 31 May 1940; and CAB 70/1 DC(S)(40)2nd:1, 7 June 1940.

31. Collier, Basil: op. cit., p. 124.

fighting units. Thus, a few days later, on 10th June, there were only 404 tanks actually in the hands of the troops in the United Kingdom. Of these 292 were tracked, machine-gun armed Vickers Mk. VI light tanks and 38 were 'wheeled' light tanks - actually machine-gun armed Guy Mk. I heavy armoured cars - and only 74 were infantry tanks. A mere 47 of the infantry tanks had 2 pdr. guns!

The armoured units at home were almost unbelievably weak in early June. (See Appendix 7.) On 10th June, the 2nd Armoured Division in Lincolnshire was still equipped entirely with 197 light tanks and lacked a single Cruiser. A further 28 light tanks were with the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry, while the 20th Armoured Brigade in Eastern Command Reserve in East Anglia had a mere 31 tracked and 38 'wheeled' tanks. There were a further 29 light tanks and 24 Matilda Mk. II's distributed between the embryo 21st, 23rd and 24th Army Tank Brigades and other units, but these were for training purposes only and the three Army Tank Brigades were under War Office control. In fact, the only fully equipped armoured unit in the whole of the United Kingdom in early June was 8 R.T.R., which had been left behind for Home Defence when 4 R.T.R. and 7 R.T.R., the greater part of 1st Army Tank Brigade, had been ordered to France in April. Situated at Tidworth on Salisbury Plain, 8 R.T.R. was not, in fact, released by the War Office to the control of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, until 13th June. This formation comprised its full 50 infantry tanks plus 7 Vickers light tanks, but only 23 of the infantry tanks were the new well armoured and 2 pdr. armed Matilda Mk. II, the remainder being the old pattern, machine-gun armed Matilda Mk. I, which had no anti-tank capacity whatsoever! Thus, when General Ironside took over the post of Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, on 27th May, and indeed up until the middle of June, there was not a single 2 pdr. armed tank directly under his control! The paucity of armour with his reserves, combined with the chronic lack of towed anti-tank guns and even anti-tank rifles, meant there was, in early June, almost a complete lack of anything with which to oppose German tanks effectively, a factor which would bode extremely ill with the defence of the U.K. if the Germans landed. General Ironside was forced to pin his hopes on improvised petrol bombs. He wrote, on 28th May:

"The state of the armament is catastrophic. I hope that it will get better in a week or two. Hope we get the week or two.... Local Defence Volunteers going well. I must get them armed with Molotoff cocktails in all the villages of England. The only way to deal with a tank." 32.

An example of the predicament to which Home Forces had been reduced may be furnished by a closer examination of the forces under Eastern Command which were most likely to be the first to meet any German attempt at invasion. The 1st London Division of three brigades (1st London, 2nd London and 135th Brigades), which guarded the vital coastal sector from the Isle of Sheppey to Rye, was in a sorry plight. The commander, Major General C. T. Liardet, complained to Eastern Command on 31st May:

"I am very weak in field artillery. I have no anti-tank guns, and an inadequate supply of anti-tank rifles and ammunition; I have no armoured cars, no A.F.V.'s, no medium machine-guns."

For mobile reserves the division depended for troop transport on civilian owned and driven 32-seater motor-coaches, which could take from 8 to 24 hours to collect, and since September 1939 almost all of its vehicles were still those hired or requisitioned from civilian firms. In late May its motorcycle reconnaissance unit had been removed and lost in the last-ditch defence of Calais, and the division possessed, at most, 21 Bren Carriers. The troops, busy preparing static defence works, lacked the time for essential training. Yet, despite their vulnerable position and the appalling lack of equipment, General Ironside noted that their spirits remained high. Visiting Kent on 29th May, he observed that the troops were, "... in fine form and very keen. They are all settling down in deadly earnest." ³³.

The 45th (West Country) Division next door in Sussex, whose 135th Brigade in Romney Marsh was at this time under command of 1st London Division, was a little better off for equipment, having 30 field guns to 1st London's 23 on 31st May (mostly 4.5" howitzers and 18 pdrs.), 154 Boys anti-tank rifles to 1st London's 47, and 63 Bren Carriers. However, there were only six 2 pdr. anti-tank guns. (See Appendix 6.) The troops of 45th (West Country) Division in early June:

".... consisted of approximately two weak Brigades [134th and 136th] disposed on the coast. The hinterland was manned almost entirely by the Volunteers [manning barricades consisting of tree trunks, old motor cars, farm carts and barbed-wire trestles on the main approaches to towns and villages]. The role of both regular troops and L.D.V.'s in the area was entirely defensive. Both had orders to hold their positions 'to the last man and the last cartridge'." ³⁴.

33. WO 166: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, Home Forces: 1st London Division, May & June 1940; and Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 29 May 1940, op. cit.

34. Brigadier G. V. Sutton Papers (G.S.C. I Home Guard, Sussex District) IWM 72/59/5, Memorandum: Dispositions of the Home Guard in Sussex, June 1940.

East Anglia, it was felt at the time, was even more likely to take the first chock of an enemy landing. The three divisions on the coast were no better off for equipment. (See Appendix 6.) On 31st May, the 15th (Scottish) in Essex had 20 field guns, while the 55th (W. Lancashire) in Suffolk and the 18th (East Anglian) in Norfolk had only 12 field guns apiece, almost all of these field guns being the obsolete 18 pdr. or 4.5" howitzer. Each division had 50 to 60 miles of coastline to guard against invasion, most of it unobstructed open beaches with a hinterland of excellent tank country, not to mention the vulnerable ports of Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Felixstowe and Harwich. To guard against a tank breakthrough, the 15th (Scottish) and 55th (W. Lancashire) Divisions had only six 2 pdr. anti-tank guns between them, while 18th (East Anglian) had none at all, and there were at most 47 Boys anti-tank rifles per division! Only the 15th (Scottish) Division had any Bren Carriers and 18th (East Anglian) Division was 183 short of its full establishment of 590 Bren light machine-guns, and all those divisions were largely immobile. The supporting 2nd London Division inland in Cambridgeshire was relatively mobile, but used mostly civilian transport and was no better off for field or anti-tank guns, having twelve and two respectively! It had also been weakened through having left two of its battalions to guard London, while the handful of machine-gun armed light tanks of 20th Armoured Brigade in mid-Anglia would be of little value. East Anglia was also extremely vulnerable to airborne attack, it being an impossible task to obstruct the innumerable possible landing sites.

The predicament of the vital Eastern Command was summarised by General Ironside in a memorandum written to the C.I.G.S. on 11th June:

"The extent of coast to be defended by Eastern Command is approximately 320 miles, 160 miles north of the Thames and 160 miles south of the Thames. Although landings are not practicable on the whole of the coast, these figures give an idea of the extent of the problem.

.... The area covered by Eastern Command is very approximately 11,200 square miles. Although many of the possible landing grounds in this Command have been obstructed, it might still be possible for strong parachute detachments to seize a landing ground and enable troop-carrying aircraft to land.

.... In view of the fact that the main threat of seaborne invasion is between The Wash and Newhaven, six divisions have been allotted to Eastern Command. Even so, divisions are holding some 80 miles of coast and 1,100 to 1,600 square miles behind the coast. As divisions are about 10,000 strong, it is apparent that there are few places in which a German landing can be opposed in strength quickly." 35.

35. CAB 106/1202: Memoranda Prepared for a Secret Session of the House of Commons on Home Defence; CREFF 1/1074/5: Memorandum to the C.I.G.S. from C.-in-C., Home Forces: Appendix A, 11 June 1940.

Such indeed was the state of Home Forces as a whole during the early days of his new appointment that General Ironside, carefully disguising the fact that he privately thought that the Germans were more likely to complete the conquest of France than to invade the United Kingdom immediately, wrote to the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 31st May:

"It is of vital importance that all possible steps be taken immediately to increase the strength of the forces available for Home Defence. I agree with the Chiefs of Staff that the British Empire is Germany's main enemy and, if she can defeat us, the subsequent capitulation of France follows as a matter of course. It may, therefore, be that Germany will launch her next offensive against this country. We are at the present time very ill-prepared to meet such an offensive which may have an initial strength of 20,000 sea-borne and 20,000 airborne troops who will be relatively well trained.

I realise that there are bound to be pressing demands from the French for assistance in men and material, but the security of Great Britain must now come first and I cannot be responsible for that security unless all available forces are placed at my disposal." 36.

In his memorandum to the C.I.G.S. on 11th June, he listed certain essential steps that should be taken "to render our defence reasonably secure", including the provision of extra Home Defence Battalions to relieve all field army personnel from the duty of guarding Vulnerable Points, the provision of hard-hitting mobile Command reserves, the provision of a G.H.Q. Reserve of the equivalent of five divisions (four extra at the time) and an extra division in Northern Ireland, the provision of a full establishment of both artillery and anti-tank guns together with the necessary ammunition, and an increase in the amount of labour and material "to construct such beach and rear defences as it is possible to man". Concluding that, "Unless these requirements can be met quickly, the very serious risk of a successful German invasion of this country must be accepted," he received instead a frosty comment from the War Office:

".... this memorandum asks for the impossible. The Commander-in-Chief is aware that every effort is being made to equip all the divisions in the country as rapidly as possible, and to provide such arms and material as are available. His task is to make the best use of what has been placed at his disposal." 37.

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36. CAB 80/12 COS(40)417 (also CREF 1/1074/5(6)): Forces for the Defence of the United Kingdom, Memorandum by the C.-in-C., Home Forces, 31 May 1940.
37. CAB 106/1202: op.cit.; and Note on Memorandum by C.-in-C., Home Forces by the War Office, 13 June 1940.

General Ironside was already trying his utmost to do this. He had begun to formulate his ideas for the land defence of the Nation. On taking up his new post on 27th May, he wrote:

"I have been into the general situation:

- (i) Enemy aliens. They must be cleared out of the coast area at once.
- (ii) All [units] must be filled up with men and material at once.
- (iii) The petrol situation is not good. There is far too much petrol in the coast areas, most of it unguarded.
- (iv) There is unrestricted movements at week-ends in the coast areas, offering the Germans any amount of transport for the taking.
- (v) There must be much more realisation of the serious nature of the position in England.
- (vi) There is a very scratch staff here in the Home Forces.
- (vii) The Civil Departments are all very slow in their methods and do not realise the value of time in military operations.

I am to have a meeting tomorrow afternoon of the Defence Committee [Home Defence Executive] and I am going to get things on the move. I shall have much more authority than poor Walter Kirke had and people cannot withstand our demands." 38.

General Ironside had great hopes for the newly raised Local Defence Volunteers. He wrote on 29th May:

"Anyway, we shall get these L.D.V.s going. Static defence in every village by blocks, and information going out from there. And thousands of Molotoff cocktails thrown down from the windows of houses. That might well settle tank columns. We just want the courage of the men. Nothing else matters. No defence is any good if the men behind it leave it and run away. The old L.D.V.s won't do that."

The following day, as the Dunkirk evacuation moved into full swing, he added:

"I shall get a great deal out of these L.D.V.s. It will differ according to the man who is in charge. I put down the following:

1. Static defence of village by blocks to prevent armoured columns moving.
2. Information from bicycle patrols issuing from the village.
3. Molotoff cocktails to deal with tanks from the windows of houses."

38. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 27 May 1940, op. cit.

General Ironside had been very much influenced by the German breakthroughs in France and had noted the paralysing effect of even very small highly mobile enemy forces operating in rear areas once the breakthrough had been made. He saw the Local Defence Volunteers as a means to prevent this paralysis from happening in England. He continued:

"If we can get this going, we ought to make easy movement through the country impossible and so avoid [repeating] the spectacle of France having her guts torn out without any effort being made to deal with the aggressor. All the troops cowering behind a water obstacle and facing nothing. Not fighting, but waiting while their very entrails were being torn out. A pitiable sight." 39.

This new concept, envisaged by General Ironside, marked a change in the role of the Local Defence Volunteers. At first, they had been conceived largely as a force to meet parachute troops, because of the tremendous reaction to the use of paratroops and airborne troops in Holland, and this role had been reflected in their members being colloquially known as "Parashots". Their primary role had been to observe and give warning of attack, and to delay, obstruct and harass the enemy when he landed, containing his movement until regular troops arrived. Now, as information about the German methods of exploiting breakthroughs filtered through to Britain, the emphasis was to shift, from opposing parachute and airborne troops, to a primary role of delaying and obstructing the small, fast, mobile, mechanised detachments that the enemy was expected to use, so as to prevent them from running wild, from destroying all communications and from creating complete confusion and panic. Already small detachments of Local Defence Volunteers were sprinkled throughout the land and improvised roadblocks were appearing at the entrances to villages to supplement those on roads leading inland from beaches or to ports. The villages were at first seen as being local rallying points for defence against paratroopers. Now, however, the scattered units would be gradually drawn into greater density at appropriate positions which lent themselves naturally to defence against the expected German equipment and tactics. Relatively strong, prepared defensive positions in villages, at road junctions, at bridges or tunnels, or even within a town, would thus be established with Local Defence Volunteers manning slit trenches, sandbagged positions in brick or stone houses, and later pillboxes and other field fortifications which would cover concrete roadblocks or obstacles on the approaches to the strongpoint. Any place on an important road, where nature

39. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 29 & 30 May 1940, op. cit.

presented a good opportunity for field fortification, might be organised into a local strongpoint, so as to deny the use of the road to the enemy, especially, of course, in the vulnerable East Anglian and South Eastern areas. ⁴⁰.

All this, however, was a gradual process and was still in its infancy in June 1940. It was also to be retarded not only by the training and organisation of the Local Defence Volunteers, which was necessary to achieve this, but also by the acute shortage of effective arms. Nevertheless, progress was being made. By 1st June, over 300,000 Local Defence Volunteers had been enrolled and, though only 94,000 rifles had been issued, more were expected very soon from Canada. Two million rounds of .22" ammunition had been issued to Commands and a further three million were to follow in the next few days. The Police were collecting all available rifles from private firms for issue to the L.D.V. and in rural areas many shot-guns were already in use. The manufacture of cartridges with lethal bullets was being pressed forward. One of the Local Defence Volunteers' tasks would be to help guard the 622 factories and public utility undertakings that had been placed on the priority lists to receive protection, thus relieving Army troops. This total was to rise to 800-900 vulnerable points by the middle of the month, and already involved 26,000 men of the Home Defence Battalions and up to 10,000 more of the Infantry Training Centres. Most of those on the East Coast were already being guarded and the L.D.V. had established a close liaison with search-light and gun units of the A.A. Command, as well as with the Observer Corps, Police and Civil Defence organisations, and with Balloon Command. ⁴¹.

By 10th June, the numbers of the L.D.V. had soared to 471,000, and by 15th June had topped 550,000 men. The issue of rifles did not keep pace with the increase in numbers and the majority were still unarmed or had merely improvised weapons. Over 100,000 rifles, including 4,000 private rifles, had been issued by 10th June, but this still meant that fewer than one man in four had a rifle. However, 15,000 Ross rifles, the first of an eventual total of 75,000, had already arrived from Canada and were in the course of issue, while over 8,000 shotguns had been handed in or were in the possession of individuals within the L.D.V.; nevertheless, the primary weapon of the

40. CAB 106/1189: Home Guard: Summary Report prepared by J. K. Howard and H. Wendell Endicott, pp. 27-29, June 1941.

41. WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940. Appendix A: Memorandum by C.-in-C., Home Forces, 4 June 1940. (Also CAB 66/8 WP(40)194.)

L.D.V. at this time was still the simple, home-made 'Molotoff cocktail' petrol bomb, which was now being mass-produced by the thousand. Instructions for their manufacture had been issued to all Commands and, by 10th June, three million matches had been distributed to Commands for use with an estimated one and a half million 'cocktails'. Experiments were also being made to improve their method of manufacture by Eastern Command.⁴² Though it was intended that Molotoff cocktails would be used against tanks, it remained, however, "very doubtful that they would be effective against anything other than soft skinned or perhaps open-topped A.F.V.'s, and then only if the thrower survived to get close enough". Their greatest benefit was "simply one of morale". Nevertheless, "any weapon was better than none".⁴³

Despite his expectations for them, General Ironside fully realised that the Local Defence Volunteers were as yet at an early stage and that not too much should be expected of them until they were properly armed, trained, uniformed and organised. He admitted to General Dill, the C.I.G.S., on 11th June:

"The L.D.V.'s should be of some value in giving a warning of air landings and should be of assistance in preventing the enemy from debouching from his landing points, but their exact value is problematical as they are only unpaid volunteers without commissioned officers." ⁴⁴.

Due to the paucity of tanks and A.F.V.'s with Home Forces, another of General Ironside's immediate priorities was to find a means of providing some sort of armoured vehicle which could be used by the mobile columns for the purpose of rapidly counter-attacking any enemy landing by sea. On 30th May he wrote:

"My chief desire is now armoured cars. When I can have those, I shall be very much better off. They should deal with motorboat landings. With infantry in buses, we should be able to deal with the parachutists."

His solution was novel, but could be speedily improvised using available resources:

42. CAB 69/1 DO(40)15th:2, 10 June 1940; and CAB 106/1202, op cit., Paper F: CRHF 1/2556: Defence Measures in Hand, Latest Details, 10 June 1940.

43. Interview with General Sir Ronald Forbes Adam, formerly G.O. C.-in-C., Northern Command, 27 Feb. 1980.

44. CAB 106/1202, op. cit., CRHF 1/1074/5: Memorandum to the C.I.G.S. from C.-in-C., Home Forces: Appendix A, 11 June 1940.

"I have decided to form troops of three motor-cars with Brens in them, commanded by a young Tank Corps officer, and to christen them 'Ironsides'. They will be given to each division to the tune of three troops." 45.

He expected to have over 400 of these improvised armoured cars ready within a matter of weeks. It was planned that 288 of the light armoured car type, mostly the Humber Mk. I 'Humberette' or 'Ironside Mk. I', on a Humber Super Snipe car chassis, would be issued in lieu of tanks to the newly formed 1st Armoured Reconnaissance Brigade, which would be positioned in reserve in East Anglia. The first 70 would be ready by 21st June and another 50 during the week ending 29th June. A second type, called 'Beaverette Mk. I', after Lord Beaverbrook, Minister for Aircraft Production, on a Standard passenger car chassis, protected by mild steel plates on a backing of 3" oak planks, entered production at the same time and was to be used for, of all things, the defence of aircraft factories, though it was also to be supplied to the R.A.F. for airfield protection and to armoured regiments waiting to be re-equipped with tanks. Both open-topped vehicles, they carried no fixed armament, but could be equipped either with a .303" Bren light machine-gun or a .55" Boys anti-tank rifle, as available, which could easily be dismounted for ground action. In addition 152 armoured wheeled vehicles of various types were soon to be produced in Eastern Command, though these were not likely to be completed for some time. These included an 8 ton fully enclosed version on a Dodge lorry chassis, which was conceived by Sir Malcolm Campbell, the racing driver and sometime holder of the world land-speed and water-speed records, who was at this time Officer Commanding, Provost Company of 1st London Division, and a simple addition to a 30 cwt. Bedford lorry chassis, which consisted of virtually no more than a rectangular armoured box mounted behind an armoured cab, with armoured plates over the radiator and petrol tanks! Both lorry types had ports for crew weapons and could mount the Bren L.M.G. or the Boys anti-tank rifle. None of these improvisations would, in fact, have been a respectable opponent to a gun-armed German tank. 46.

45. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 27 & 30 May 1940, op. cit.

46. CAB 106/1202, op cit., Paper F: CRHF 1/2556: Defence Measures in Hand, Latest Details, 10 June 1940; and White, B. T., Tanks and Other A.F.V.s of the Blitzkrieg Era, 1939 to 1945, pp. 135-137, Blandford, Poole, 1972.

Notwithstanding their obvious deficiencies, both the Local Defence Volunteers and the 'Ironsides' were essential elements of the plan of defence that General Ironside was forming in his mind. He envisaged that:

"What we want is the static defence in the towns and villages and the mobile columns working inbetween..... We cannot make the whole place a fortress, but we can probably canalise the routes of attack.... My own view is that we want for the defence of England two things:

(a) A static defence:

To cover vulnerable points, and the L.D.V.s for the restriction of movement.

(b) A mobile defence:

Largely motor columns, with the special 'Ironsides', followed by sufficient infantry in lorries. All these columns must be small. They should not be organised on a divisional basis at all. Such an organisation is too clumsy." 47.

Nevertheless, in early June, the defence plan was essentially still an updated version of 'Julius Caesar', even though the two elements of the Local Defence Volunteers and the 'Ironsides' with the mobile columns, had now been introduced. G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 1, issued to Home Forces on 5th June, made no major changes in the sequence of action that the troops would take in the event of an enemy attack, except that now the emphasis was on repelling both an airborne and a seaborne landing, not primarily an airborne landing as had been the case up until the end of May. Thus, firstly the troops, including the L.D.V.s, in the area of a seaborne or airborne landing, would inflict maximum casualties on the enemy while he was landing, the enemy forces having, with luck, already been discovered while in passage and having suffered losses through attack by the Royal Navy and R.A.F.. Secondly, should the enemy have succeeded in landing, the area held by him was to be picketed by a cordon of such troops as could be quickly made available, to give time for stronger forces to concentrate and attack the enemy. Commands would organise small mobile columns ready to move to the area where landings had been effected, while the L.D.V.s would hold their observation posts and, in certain cases, man roadblocks to help prevent the enemy debouching from the area, at the same time sending information of any enemy movement to the nearest military commander. Certain A.A. mobile detachments would come under command of the G.O. C.-in-C.'s

47. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 1 June 1940, op. cit.

Commands, as soon as operations against parachutists commenced. Thirdly, larger formations would be moved by the Commands as necessary to attack the enemy and, finally, the IV Corps in G.H.Q. Reserve would be employed as necessary "either remaining under command of G.H.Q. or a part of the whole being decentralised to Commands". Home Forces would also have the support of two bomber squadrons which would be under command of G.H.Q. and be allotted as required, and five Army Co-operation squadrons, two of which were under Eastern Command, while one each was under Northern, Western and Scottish Commands, respectively. Beach defences, obstructions on landing grounds, roadblocks, pillboxes and demolitions were all to play their part in the scheme of things, while the general policy for defence:

".... is that there will be no withdrawal and that, should the enemy gain a foothold anywhere, he will be driven out again as quickly as possible."

The overall intention was stated simply as being: "To destroy any enemy troops landed in the British Isles." ⁴⁸.

There was, however, one significant change that was to have grave repercussions on a grim night three months in the future. This was the substitution by General Ironside of the existing codeword 'Caesar', which was to warn units that invasion was imminent, by the more inspiring one of 'Cromwell'. 'Julius' had already been issued on 10th May and Home Forces had since been at a state of readiness of eight hours' notice, so the existing double codeword 'Julius Caesar' was now outdated. G.H.Q. Operational Order No. 1 stated that, on receipt of the new codeword 'Cromwell', "troops would take up battle stations, telegraph lines essential for operational purposes will be taken over and all liaison officers will take up their duties." Issue of this word would reduce the normal eight hours' notice down to readiness for immediate action. Unfortunately, there were two shortcomings that were not apparent until much later, the first being that no provision was made for intermediate stages between the eight hours and immediate readiness, and the second was that the system was not properly explained to formations and units which subsequently came under the command of Home Forces. ⁴⁹.

48. WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940. Appendix B: G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 1, 5 June 1940.

49. ibid.

CHAPTER 6: RETURN OF THE B.E.F.

Progress continued apace in providing General Ironside's twin elements of a static and a mobile defence. By the middle of June, the production of anti-tank mines had reached 80-90,000 a month, while of a further 200,000 anti-tank mines "of a heavy type", that were being supplied by the Admiralty, 100,000 would be available by 20th July and another 100,000 by 24th August, issue having already commenced. These mines would mostly be placed in carefully charted minefields, either in beach exits or, where egress from the beaches was unobstructed, above the high-water mark. Not many minefields or concrete anti-tank obstacles, however, had been provided as early as June, though good progress was made during the month on the East and South East Coasts on wiring beaches above the high-water mark and in the construction of pillboxes with L.M.G.'s to cover all these obstacles, both on the beaches themselves or in the beach exits. Some 291,000 coils of Dannert concertina wire and 2,000 tons of barbed wire were issued for beach defence during June to supplement the 251,000 coils of Dannert wire and 100 tons of barbed wire issued up to 31st May. As early as 10th June, General Ironside was able to report optimistically on the static defence of the coast:

"A complete system of coast watching, with communications to the headquarters of divisions, had been instituted, and was being improved. Special bodies of men were being appointed in the various districts adjoining the coasts, who would know the country intimately, and who were mobile 32,000 men were allotted to the holding of defensive positions in places where we could not afford to give up any ground to the enemy. Very rapid progress was being made in the preparation of beach defences, the manning of guns, the erection of wire and pillboxes, and on the defences of harbours on the landward side." ¹.

Inland, progress was being made on the construction of roadblocks; the obstruction of possible landing grounds, not only within five miles of certain specified ports, within five miles of aerodromes required by the R.A.F., and within the Metropolitan area of London, but also within five miles of civil and private aerodromes and of practicable beach landing places; and also on preparations for demolition of bridges near specified ports, though it was instructed that charges on bridges on main communications should definitely not be laid. The general policy as regards roadblocks and demolition of communications was that they should be designed to

1. CAB 106/1202: Memoranda Prepared for a Secret Session of the House of Commons on Home Defence, Paper F: CRHF 1/2556: Defence Measures in Hand, Latest Details, 10 June 1940; and CAB 69/1 DO(40)15th:2, 10 June 1940.

prevent or delay the extension of any enemy foothold without prejudicing offensive operations to destroy that foothold. ².

Throughout June too, a significant degree of progress was made on the fixed defences. The 'beach batteries' of the Emergency Battery Programme were now to comprise 54 batteries each of two 6" guns, two batteries each of two 4" guns and nine batteries each of two 4.7" guns on the East, South East and South Coasts from Shetland to Fowey, while an additional six two-gun 6" batteries were to be installed on the West Coast from Avonmouth to Bsrrow. Of this grand total of 71 'beach batteries', 39 were ready on 11th June, compared with only 16 on 4th June, 12 more would be completed by 18th June and, it was hoped, the remaining 20 would be ready by 25th June. Each battery also comprised two searchlights and, due to the shortage of troops for coast defence, half of these ex-naval guns were manned at first by Royal Marine or Navy personnel until Army crews became available. The primary role of the 'beach batteries' was seaward defence, with beach defence being their secondary role. Placed in open pits without overhead protection, they relied on camouflage to prevent them being dive-bombed, strafed or shelled from the sea. Also, to aid concealment for as long as possible as well as to save ammunition that was in critically short supply and to offset the inexperience of the crews, orders were given that the gunners should hold their fire until the enemy approached within four miles. Unfortunately this would limit them to about half their effective range of around 12,000 yards and such batteries were likely to prove woefully inadequate to stop a determined invasion force from pressing ashore. If an enemy landing occurred in the vicinity of a port or important estuary, however, the beach batteries might be supplemented by fire from the guns of the permanent defences, which were themselves being reinforced during June by further 6 pdr. and 12 pdr. guns to deal with light surface craft at Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Ramsgate, Newhaven and West Hartlepool, and on the Humber, Thames and Medway estuaries. In spite of all these additions, the fixed defences left many places unguarded or inadequately protected, while ammunition for all guns was often severely limited, the 4.7" pieces, for example, having only 60 rounds per gun. ³.

2. WO 166/1: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, G.H.Q., Home Forces, June 1940, Appendix B: G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 1, 5 June 1940.

3. CAB 106/1202: op. cit., Paper F: CREF 1/2556: op. cit.; and Collier, Basil: History of the Second World War: The Defence of the United Kingdom, p. 131, H.M.S.O., London, 1957.

To help provide the other essential element, a mobile defence, General Ironside had begun the process of re-organising all the infantry divisions on a basis of mobile brigade groups of all arms, while a scheme was in hand "whereby two infantry brigades per division for 16 divisions will be made mobile by the creation of Troop Carrying Companies R.A.S.C.". ⁴ He intended to use these mobile columns at an early stage if the Germans attempted a seaborne landing:

"If the Germans ever attempt a landing here, they will put the utmost energy into establishing what might be called a 'bridgehead' in England. All our energies must be put into stopping this. No waiting for more troops to come up. Our mobile forces must attack at once, regardless of losses, and nip the landing in the bud. We cannot inculcate the idea too much into everybody concerned." ⁵

By 10th June, he was able to report to the Defence Committee that, "the arming of these divisions with rifles, Bren-guns, anti-tank rifles, and armoured carriers, was on the whole fairly complete". There were, however, two chief weaknesses, firstly that, "the men in these divisions were not yet adequately trained for attack," and secondly that, "there was a great shortage of artillery and anti-tank guns". ⁶

Thus, if the Germans gained a bridgehead and managed to land tanks in force, they might very well succeed in penetrating deep into the Country, bypassing the stronger static defences or crushing the positions of the poorly armed L.D.V.s, while the mobile columns could do little to prevent them. This nightmarish situation had already led to the French defeat and General Ironside was seriously worried by the lack of means in Britain to counter it effectively. He wrote on 30th May:

"Our great handicap in this country is the lack of any kind of tank. If the Germans get their tanks ashore, they will be much more difficult to round up. Once a column is ashore, they will push on with the utmost brutality. I hope to have a good many of these 6 pdr. and 12 pdr. guns mounted on light lorries. They may not be tanks, but they may get a shot and knock the gentlemen out. Our people must act just as the Germans do and go straight in and attack whatever the casualties. Gradually, perhaps, I shall get some tanks." ⁷

4. WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940. Appendix A: Memorandum by C.-in-C., Home Forces, 4 June 1940; also CAB 66/8 WP(40)194.

5. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 30 May 1940 (Col. R. Macleod transcript).

6. CAB 69/1 DO(40)15th:2, 10 June 1940.

7. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 30 May 1940, op. cit.

Progress was swift. As early as 4th June, he was able to report:

"A number of 3 pdr., 12 pdr. and 4" guns are being mounted in lorries and are being issued to Commands. The first lot will be available in three or four days and the total number of 76 will be completed in about a fortnight." 8.

By 10th June, General Ironside was able to add that 32 x 6 pdr. Hotchkiss guns were being mounted on extemporised travelling carriages and organised on an eight gun battery basis for mobile anti-tank work, while 24 x 4" guns and 25 x 12 pdrs., also organised into eight gun batteries, were to be mounted on 10 ton lorries for a similar role. In addition, it was planned that some 350 additional 6 pdrs., of which 50 were immediately available, were to be mounted on concrete pedestals in pillboxes for static anti-tank defence, while another 50 x 4" guns were also available and would be placed on immobile baulk platforms for beach defence against tanks or landing craft, either sited for the landward defence of ports, to cover beach exits, or to fire in enfilade along the beach itself. By 16th June, no less than 112 x 6 pdrs. were available for a similar static role, enough for 14 batteries, and more guns were to follow quickly. A proportionate allotment of all these types was being made to Commands, with Eastern Command, of course, receiving the most, followed closely by Northern Command. 9.

In fact, these 3 pdr., 6 pdr., and 12 pdr. guns were all Naval quick-firing artillery pieces, while the 4" was also a shell-firing Naval gun. They were not true anti-tank guns at all, though they did have some anti-tank capacity at the closest ranges. There was little else available, however, so every shot had to count. G.H.Q. Artillery Instruction No. 1, issued on 16th June, gave strict instructions on this point:

"If gun positions are exposed too soon, they may be neutralised by enemy supporting A.F.V.'s and aircraft, hence the vital importance of concealment. The first shot must be a hit and fire must be withheld until a hit is certain. The maximum range for opening fire should be 600 yards with all anti-tank guns." 10.

8. WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940. Appendix A: op. cit., 4 June 1940; also CAB 66/8 WP(40)194.

9. CAB 106/1202: op. cit., Paper F: 1/2556: Defence Measures in Hand, Latest Details, 10 June 1940; and WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940. Appendix G: G.H.Q. Artillery Instruction No. 1, 16 June 1940.

10. WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940. Appendix G: op. cit., 16 June 1940.

Despite the appalling deficiencies of Home Forces at this time, General Ironside strove to maintain a confident exterior. In an exhortation for all senior officers to be handed out to troops on 11th June, he, unashamedly using his own surname, as he had done already by naming the improvised armoured cars, 'Ironsides', and the new Codeword, 'Cromwell', to conjure up the inspiring historic figure of Oliver Cromwell, whose cavalry, nicknamed the 'Ironsides', had performed so well during the English Civil Wars almost 300 years before, wrote:

".... We must train and prepare in deadly earnest. We must turn that preparation to the best account by fighting in deadly earnest, as did Cromwell's Ironsides, for what they considered their rights. There must be no weakling amongst the military leaders, just as there must be none amongst the rank and file. The day has only a certain number of hours in it and we must work as if there were only too few available. The time has gone for quiet and ease and the comfortable routine of peace. All military leaders must exact the utmost from their subordinates. In the defence of our country, the principle of instant attack against any enemy landing on our shores, either from the air or from the sea, must be inculcated into all ranks. There must be no question of cowering behind an obstacle, waiting to be attacked. The enemy must be located instantly, isolated, and attacked before he can gather strength. When he comes, he can be but lightly equipped during his initial assaults. Then is the time to deal with him with the utmost determination and self-sacrifice. Any leader who fails to act at once is failing in his duty. Let each leader and each man go out with Cromwell's words in his mind: 'It's no longer disputing, but out instantly all you can.'" 11.

Privately, however, he admitted:

"My main fear is the penetration by armoured fighting vehicles. I am very lacking in gun-power and I can see no immediate prospect of reinforcement at the moment. I have called into being every available gun that I can find and I have mounted them both as static and as mobile units. I can do no more at the moment." 12.

* * *

In the meantime, the British Expeditionary Force had succeeded in struggling back from Dunkirk. By the close of 4th June, the evacuation was complete and all resistance at Dunkirk had come to an end. A total of 338,226 troops had been landed in England, of which some 225,000 were British. Almost overnight the bulk of twelve divisions, plus another from Norway, had

11. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 8 June 1940, op. cit.

12. *ibid.*, 9 June 1940.

been added to the strength of Home Forces. These additions from the B.E.F. in France comprised the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and two brigades of the 5th Regular Divisions; the first-line Territorial 42nd (East Lancashire), 44th (Home Counties), 48th (South Midland), and 50th (Northumbrian) Divisions; and the second-line Territorial 23rd (Northumbrian), two brigades of 46th (North Midland and West Riding) and one brigade of 12th (Eastern) Divisions, which had been used primarily for labour duties on the lines of communication. Also rescued from Dunkirk were the personnel of 1st Army Tank Brigade and various supporting and lines of communications units, while the two battalions of the independent 20th Guards Brigade had been successfully evacuated from Boulogne, though the composite Brigade of Riflemen and 3 R.T.R. at Calais were not so lucky. With the two brigades of 49th (West Riding) Division, which had been evacuated from south of Narvik by 31st May, this gave a total of 28 infantry and one armoured division now in Great Britain, compared with the 15 infantry and one armoured division previously with Home Forces, while a further infantry division, 53rd (Welsh), still remained in Northern Ireland. Winston Churchill minuted exuberantly to the Chiefs of Staff:

"The successful evacuation of the B.E.F. has revolutionised the Home Defence position. As soon as the B.E.F. units can be reformed on a Home Defence basis, we have a mass of trained troops in the Country which would require a raid to be executed on a prohibitively large scale. Even 200,000 men would not be beyond our compass. The difficulties of a descent and its risks and losses increase with every addition to the first 10,000...." 13.

While it was true that there were now thousands of trained and battle-experienced troops in Great Britain and that the shortage of manpower had been largely resolved, Churchill, however, was being unduly optimistic. The will to fight on was never lacking and was epitomised in the Prime Minister's magnificent speech to the House of Commons on 4th June, in which he avowed:

".... we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender." 14.

13. CAB 80/12 COS(40)419: Future Military Policy: Note for the C.O.S. Committee by the Minister of Defence, 2 June 1940.

14. Churchill, W. S.: Vol. II, Their Finest Hour, pp. 103-104. Cassell, London, 1949.

However, the means to do so were very lacking. The main handicap was, as usual, the chronic lack of equipment with Home Forces, and the arrival home of the B.E.F. increased this problem severalfold. The B.E.F. had, in fact, lost over 2,300 guns including 432 x 2 pdr. anti-tank guns, 315 of the 380 25 mm. anti-tank guns purchased from the French, 837 modern 25 pdr. or 18/25 pdr. field guns, 208 medium guns, 24 heavy guns and over 500 A.A. guns, 7,000 tons of ammunition, 90,000 rifles, 8,200 Bren light machine guns, over 4,000 Boys anti-tank rifles, 63,900 motor vehicles of all types and almost half a million tons of stores. The 1st Army Tank Brigade had lost all the infantry tanks that it had taken to France and 3 R.T.R. all its Cruisers, while several hundred light tanks with these units and with the cavalry elements of the infantry divisions had also been lost. About 400 tanks of all types had been lost in all. Nearly 34,000 personnel, too, had been lost in the retreat or on the beaches, many as prisoners-of-war, though some 13,000 of these were wounded and had been returned home before or during the Dunkirk evacuation. ¹⁵.

Thus, the returned divisions of the B.E.F. would not become an effective weapon of Home Defence until the greater part of these losses had been made good, a task that would take considerable time and would be in addition to the making up of the deficiencies of the original Home Defence divisions. Britain's position was unenviable, to say the least. General Ironside commented on the returned B.E.F.:

"I must say that I never credited the fact that we should get so many bodies off. Now they are useful, but the equipment is lacking. Shall we ever get the time to get them ready to fight....?"

Nevertheless, he noted their good morale, despite their ordeal. Visiting York on 6th June, he recalled:

"We saw all kinds of B.E.F. men going off on leave. All very sunburnt and cheery. They will have a good effect upon the people in England. They will make them realise that there is a war on and that we have to fight to keep what we have got. I am sure that they will bring a healthy spirit into things.... We now have the men of the B.E.F. in the country and after seventy-two hours' leave they will be back forming in their divisions. They will be of the greatest value in every way...." ¹⁶.

15. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., p. 125; and Collier, Basil: op. cit., p. 127.

16. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 4 & 6 June 1940, op. cit.

General Ironside's problems, however, were far from over. On 3rd June, the War Cabinet decided, in response to French demands for assistance at the Supreme War Council on 31st May, to approve the build up of a second B.E.F. for operations in France to the south of the River Somme. This was a courageous decision at a time when General Ironside needed every formation for Home Defence. The core of this new B.E.F. was already in France, and consisted of the detached 51st (Highland) Division, the recently arrived 1st Armoured Division, the remainder of two of the three second-line Territorial 'labour' divisions, 12th (Eastern) and 46th (North Midland and West Riding), and a host of lines of communications formations, some of which had been formed into the improvised 'Beauman Division' on 27th May. French pressure on Britain to reinforce these British forces in Western France continued, and Churchill had given Britain's promise that, barring keeping an adequate force at home including the vital R.A.F. fighter squadrons to secure against invasion, no effort would be spared by Great Britain and her Empire to help the French continue the fight.¹⁷ The Chiefs of Staff, too, had advised the War Cabinet in favour of establishing a second B.E.F., because of the "good psychological effect on France" it would have, and because Britain could not ignore "the grave military consequences which might arise should we give no further support to France". However, they had also added the grim warning that, "Any forces despatched to France can virtually be written off."¹⁸

The renewed German offensive on France to the south of the River Somme commenced on 5th June and from this time onwards it became a race to reinforce the British forces in Western France in a vain attempt to prevent a French collapse. Despite the Chiefs of Staff's grave warning, preparatory orders had already been sent from the War Office to G.H.Q., Home Forces, on 3rd June, that the fully-trained 52nd (Lowland) Division was to be prepared to move overseas at an early date and on 5th June the Chiefs of Staff made their decision to despatch this division, to be followed soon after by 1st Canadian Division, a reconstituted 3rd (Regular) Division and 43rd (Wessex) Division, in that order as they became available.¹⁹ Departing on 7th June, 52nd (Lowland) Division began landing in Western France on 9th June. On 5th

17. CAB 99/3 SWC(39/40)13th:1, 31 May 1940; and CAB 65/13 WM(40)153rd:10, 3 June 1940.

18. CAB 66/7 WP(40)189; also COS(40)421: Western Front: British Military Policy, Report by COS Committee, 3 June 1940.

19. CAB 79/4 COS(40)169th:1, 5 June 1940.

June, General Ironside received similar preparatory orders from the War Office for 1st Canadian Division. This division at first had been almost held back because of political reasons, but it was finally sent as the Chiefs of Staff considered it to be "in the most advanced state of readiness for despatch overseas fully trained with its equipment nearing completion". This was despite the Chiefs of Staff deciding, on 2nd June, that "it would be a grave military risk to let the Canadians go to France", since it was "the most effective mobile reserve for the defence of this Country and can consequently be less easily spared than any other division".²⁰ The 1st Canadian Division was to begin its departure on 11th June, and its leading 1st Canadian Brigade landed at Brest the following day. Even worse was to follow for Home Forces on 8th June, as notification reached G.H.Q. that the 3rd (Regular) Division, recently returned from Dunkirk, was to receive priority in re-equipment so that it, too, could shortly be despatched to Western France.²¹

Thus, within the space of a few days, General Ironside was deprived of the use of two of the three relatively well-equipped divisions that made up IV Corps in G.H.Q. Reserve. Since the formations of the B.E.F. at home were only just commencing re-forming and re-equipping, this left him temporarily with only a single well-equipped division, the 43rd (Wessex), to act as the G.H.Q. Reserve for the whole of Great Britain. In view of the Chiefs of Staff's recent assertion that an invasion of the United Kingdom was "imminent", the task of repelling it successfully would be truly a daunting prospect!

Not only this, but the divisions now ordered to Western France, or earmarked to follow shortly, could only be made up to their full establishment in material by drawing on the equipment of the other Home Defence divisions. On 30th May, General Ironside had warned the new C.I.G.S., General Dill, that:

".... it would probably take the essential equipment of one or perhaps two divisions to make up the Canadians to their full strength, if they are to go to France. That is a most serious thing to contemplate."²²

20. CAB 79/4 COS(40)163rd:4, 2 June 1940; and CAB 66/7 WP(40)189, also COS(40)421: op. cit., 3 June 1940.

21. WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940.

22. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 30 May 1940, op. cit.

The Chiefs of Staff themselves noted on 3rd June that the 52nd (Lowland) Division, too, could only be completed and made ready for service "by transferring to it the artillery and anti-tank guns of the 49th Division".²³

The Canadians were, in fact, to take a full quota of 72 field guns with them and, though the 52nd were only to take 36, these were all invaluable modern 25 pdrs. and, together with Corps artillery, was to leave Home Forces with only 485 serviceable field guns with units, on 14th June. The anti-aircraft guns of the Corps troops of the new B.E.F. could "only be provided at the expense of the A.D.G.B.", while the 3rd Division had lost all its heavy equipment at Dunkirk and needed to be fully equipped, the Chiefs of Staff noting, on 14th June, that:

"The result of concentrating on the re-equipment of the 3rd Regular Division for service in France was to hold up very seriously the re-equipment of the remaining Regular divisions which were to be used for Home Defence."²⁴

Even 43rd (Wessex) Division, the last division remaining in G.H.Q. Reserve on 5th June, was earmarked as a reinforcement to France in the near future, to follow 3rd Division later in the month. This division was not only equally badly off for equipment, but was as yet under-trained. The Chiefs of Staff noted on 3rd June that it:

".... has only just completed Company training, and is deficient in certain essential items of artillery equipment. It is possible that a certain amount of the artillery could be collected from various sources or possibly even provided by the French. If the grave deficiencies in training and equipment of this division are accepted, it could be ready for despatch some time during the latter half of June."²⁵

The despatch of these forces, virtually all the best equipped formations in the whole of the United Kingdom, was indeed a desperate gamble at this most dangerous time. It would involve the gravest risks to British security, though the plight of France was, of course, regarded as being much greater. The Chiefs of Staff concluded, on 3rd June:

23. CAB 66/7 WP(40)189; also COS(40)421: op. cit., 3 June 1940.

24. CAB 79/5 COS(40)181st:2, 14 June 1940.

25. CAB 66/7 WP(40)189; also COS(40)421: op. cit., 3 June 1940.

"We endorse the opinion of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, that the forces present in this country are, by reason of their lack of equipment and of training, barely adequate to meet a serious seaborne invasion. The return of the B.E.F. on which M. Reynaud places so much emphasis, though improving considerably the calibre of the manpower available, does not at the moment increase our defensive power, owing to the fact that they have lost all their equipment." 26.

The equipment situation at home was so desperate that, on 10th June, the War Cabinet approved a proposal by the Secretary of State for War to amalgamate five pairs of divisions so as to economise on equipment, though each of the infantry brigades of both divisions in each pair would be retained as complete units. This arrangement would also be economical in Headquarters Staff and ancillary troops, would leave sufficient infantry over to form independent brigade groups, and would relieve the Holding Battalions from coast defence duties, thus enabling them to revert to their proper role. 27. In the event, though, only three divisions, the 12th (Eastern), 23rd (Northumbrian) and 66th (Lancashire and Borders), were actually to be broken up within the next few weeks, while a fourth, the 9th (Scottish), was to suffer a similar fate early in August, when it was merged into the depleted 51st (Highland) Division. This latter division, indeed, suffered a disaster on 12th June, when the bulk of its strength was surrounded and forced to lay down its arms at St. Valerie in France, some 4,300 men only escaping in all. General Ironside commented on this further blow to the British Army:

"Another division, the last of the original B.E.F., destroyed in a few days. We seem to be fated. Are we going on shipping people to France to be caught and stripped of their equipment?" 28.

As a result of the decision to establish a second B.E.F. in Western France, it was now decided that the fully-trained and battle-experienced divisions, that had been plucked from disaster at Dunkirk, were to be the first to receive new equipment as it came from the factories. General Ironside wrote, on 8th June:

26. CAB 66/7 WP(40)189; also COS(40)421: op. cit., 3 June 1940.

27. CAB 65/7 WM(40)160th:11, 10 June 1940; and CAB 66/8 WP(40)196: Re-organisation and Re-equipment of the B.E.F., Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 8 June 1940.

28. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 12 June 1940, op. cit.

"It is extraordinary how the shuttle moves backwards and forwards. Now the P.M. has given 'priority' to the re-equipment of the B.E.F. for France. Naturally, while they are in this Country they are available for operations. We shall get no more equipment for the troops in this country." 29.

The first stage was merely to bring these divisions of the B.E.F. up to full strength in manpower and to provide basic personnel arms and equipment. This could be achieved fairly quickly. General Ironside described their state to the Defence Committee (Operations) on 10th June:

"The strength of divisions varied between 7,000 and 11,000, but they would rapidly be made up to full strength from Holding Battalions. A complete new issue of rifles was being made, which would be concluded in a few days. Bren guns were also being issued, but this would be a slower process, as we had not got enough in hand to complete all the divisions. The 3rd Division, which would be the first to complete, would have its full outfit of arms and equipment by 20th June. Progress was at present being held up by the fact that some of the Holding Battalions were actually in the line in certain parts of the defences. These would be relieved as soon as the B.E.F. was re-formed, and the progress of this again depended upon a decision on the proposals for amalgamation of divisions." 30.

Heavy equipment, however, would take much longer to provide. In fact, the only heavy equipment that could be produced in some numbers within a short space of time was the improvised 'Ironside' types of lightly armoured motor cars equipped with Bren guns. On 13th June, General Ironside wrote enthusiastically:

"We are now going to turn the cavalry from the divisions of the B.E.F. into the 'Ironsides'. They have no equipment and are somewhat at a loose end. They are the best troops in this country and will be fitted to attack.

Rearmament of the B.E.F. goes faster than it was. I shall be able to get these divisions moved into their proper positions very soon. I am calling for a report each evening of the state of the six cavalry regiments being rearmed with armoured cars. That is what we want for dealing with both air and sea-landings. Infantry are no good for attack without them." 31.

The rate of re-equipment depended on production and this, in spite of a production drive, increased agonisingly slowly. The production of modern 15 pdr. field guns, for example, was only 42 a month in June, which, added to a

29. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 8 June 1940, op. cit.

30. CAB 69/1 DC(40)15th:2, 10 June 1940.

31. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 13 June 1940, op. cit.

similar number of 18/25 pdrs. converted during this period, plus a small number of obsolete 18 pdrs. and 4.5" howitzers which had undergone repair, gave only enough field artillery produced in June to equip the equivalent of a single division! The number of 25 pdrs. produced, however, was to rise to 60 in July and to 72 in August, while further 18/25 pdrs. were converted and more old guns repaired. The production rate of Cruiser and Infantry tanks was better with a rate of 115 a month in June, a figure that was to increase to 129 in July and drop marginally to 126 in August. In June and July, production rates per month averaged about 8,000 rifles, 2,000 Bren L.M.G.'s, 250 Vickers H.M.G.'s, 1,400 Boys anti-tank rifles, 500 2" mortars, 200 3" mortars, 60 2 pdr. anti-tank guns, 120 Bofors light A.A. guns, 150 3.7" heavy A.A. guns, and 9,000 wheeled military vehicles.³² Considering that the establishment of a British infantry division in June 1940, even excluding its base reserves, was 11,800 rifles, 590 Bren L.M.G.'s, 36 Vickers H.M.G.'s, 307 Boys anti-tank rifles, 108 2" mortars, 36 3" mortars, 48 2 pdr. anti-tank guns, 90 Bren Carriers, 72 25 pdr. field guns and 2,576 technical and drawing wheeled vehicles, not to mention load-carrying vehicles, it can be readily seen that to equip fully the 30 infantry divisions soon to be present in the United Kingdom, especially in anti-tank and field guns and in wheeled vehicles, from new production alone, would take many months. The only hope was from arms which were now being sent from the U.S.A. and the Empire. General Ironside wrote, on 14th June:

"We are working away and pouring out the equipment as fast as we can and every day makes a difference to us. It takes a week's output of Brens to equip a division. Slow enough.

The U.S.A. seems to be sending off the stuff to us and it may come in time. Shall we have any of our ports open in three months' time? A great struggle for the existence of the Empire...."³³

* * *

The Chiefs of Staff, meanwhile, had been reappraising the scale of attack that the Germans could mount on the United Kingdom. A detailed report by the Joint Intelligence Sub Committee, which was discussed by the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 7th June and a copy sent to General Ironside, stated

32. Postan, M. M.: History of the Second World War: British War Production, pp. 176 & 183, H.M.S.O., London, 1952; and CAB 70/1 & 2: Minutes & Memoranda of Defence Committee (Supply), June & July 1940.

33. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 14 June 1940, op. cit.

that, although the Germans had adequate land forces for an invasion even with the renewed offensive on France in full progress, their air forces were presently heavily committed south of the Somme and did not have the ability to deliver a full-scale attack against both France and Britain. It was thought that the Germans preferred their strategy of concentrating on one aim at a time and would attempt to complete the defeat of France before embarking on a new and difficult venture. Therefore, the J.I.C. correctly assumed that, "It is probable that the Germans will not attempt an attack on the British Isles co-incident with the renewed attack on the French." Nevertheless, an invasion was increasingly likely and would be even more so if the French collapsed. The J.I.C. report continued:

"The invasion of this Country will be for Germany her culminating effort of the War. She may be expected, therefore, to press it with the utmost intensity, regardless of loss, and to throw into the balance all her available resources." 34.

The sequence of attack, though, would differ little from previous assessments. The first effort was expected to be an air offensive lasting without cessation for a number of days, with the aim of neutralizing the R.A.F. fighters and bombers by air combat and by bombing aerodromes, R.D.F. stations, R.A.F. storage and maintenance depots and the aircraft industry. Air attack would also be likely on Government and military centres, and on centres of communication and transportation, especially those which would affect the movement of reserves and supplies to the threatened point. There might also be indiscriminate and widespread bombing to break down public morale. This initial effort would be combined with, or followed by, operations to reduce severely the Royal Navy's effectiveness to intervene by air, submarine and M.T.B. attacks on ships at sea, air attacks on ports, attempts to mine our Naval forces into their bases, and by attempts to divert British light Naval forces away from the invasion routes by means of diversions staged by the German Navy in the North Sea or Western Approaches, or even by airborne landings in such places as Iceland, the Faroes, Shetlands or Northern Scotland. The Chiefs of Staff were to add that even a landing in the North of England might be attempted as "an embarrassing diversion". No less than 4,800 tons of bombs per day might be expected, though this figure, based on the initial carrying capacity of the aeroplanes thought to be

34. CAB 80/12 COS(40)432(JIC); also JIC(40)101: Summary of the Likely Forms and Scales of Attack that Germany could Bring to Bear on the British Isles in the Near Future, Report by J.I.C., 6 June 1940.

available, was later considered to be too high and was reduced. Up to 1,600 long-range bombers and, subsequently, 400 dive bombers and 500 fighters, were expected to be involved. ³⁵.

The initial invasion, which was likely to be made from the air, using landing grounds and open spaces, was expected to follow only when a large measure of air superiority had first been attained. The Germans were believed to have sufficient aircraft to transport some 9,750 lightly equipped men in one flight. The number of flights per day would vary between one and a half for East Anglia to three for Kent. In view of air and ground opposition and the need to land some heavy equipment, it was thought "unlikely that the number landed in the first day would be more than 10,000 [soon increased to 15,000] for East Anglia or 20,000 for Kent". These figures would include the 5,000 trained parachutist troops that the Germans were known to possess, while seaplanes and gliders might also be used. The bulk of the airborne troops would form the advance guard of the main seaborne invasion, but perhaps 1,000 others "would certainly be landed elsewhere over wide areas to co-operate with the Fifth Column, and to cause confusion and dispersion of effort". ³⁶. Finally, there would follow the seaborne invasion, which General Ironside expected would be "pushed forward with the utmost brutality". ³⁷.

General Ironside considered this assessment as being something of a 'worst case' scale of attack. He commented:

"This is a dismal enough picture as regards numbers and takes little account of weather and opposition from the Navy and Air Force. Probably it can be very much reduced...."

Airborne attack he regarded as being a serious nuisance, but not a deciding factor in itself. This, he wrote:

".... may take place at many places and from any direction. It may begin by parachutists, to be followed by troop-carrying 'planes. Such attack may come very quickly, but it must be limited in strength, both by reason of numbers and of weight. It is impossible to block all possible landing-places for troop-carriers, and parachutists cannot be prevented from

35. CAB 80/12 COS(40)432(JIC); also JIC(40)101: op. cit., 6 June 1940; and CAB 79/4 COS(40)172nd:3, 7 June 1940.

36. CAB 80/12 COS(40)432(JIC); also JIC(40)101: op. cit., 6 June 1940.

37. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 8 June 1940, op. cit.

landing. But they can be subjected to very heavy casualties before they reach the ground. The answer to such attacks is extreme mobility and instant action for their extermination, combined with a good local defence to supply information, and a check to movement from the centre of the main landing.

Such attacks will be employed in conjunction with seaborne landings to cause dispersion and to upset our command. They may be extremely annoying if the commanders do not keep their heads. But in themselves such attacks will not be decisive." 38.

Seaborne attack, however, would be another kettle of fish entirely. The Joint Intelligence Sub Committee felt that this would immediately follow on from an extensive airborne operation, due to the difficulty of supplying the airborne troops over a lengthy period by air alone. They expected that the Germans would still mount their main expedition from the North German ports, so as to achieve the greatest measure of surprise. This was likely to be carried in large transports, while smaller craft, including fast motor-boats and "special landing craft", would collect in the numerous canals and estuaries along the Dutch, Belgian and French coasts. By assembling shipping at many points in this manner and in the shortest possible time, the Germans might expect to have the greatest chance of evading our reconnaissance, and by attacking on a dark night or at early dawn, and at high tide, be able to secure a lodgement before the British defenders could be sufficiently alerted. "It is probable," stated the J.I.C., "... that the Germans will employ their maximum scale of effort, and will be prepared to accept almost catastrophic losses." 39.

Due to the limited range at which their dive bombers and short-range fighters could fully co-operate, the short sea crossing and the overriding importance of capturing London, it was expected that the Germans would most favour the area between The Wash and Newhaven, with the East Anglian and Kentish coasts, as usual, being the most likely of all, because of the difficulty involved in "forcing the straights of Dover" if the invasion were to be in Sussex. This area, however, the J.I.C. warned, "will extend to the Westward according to the progress of a German advance in Northern France". The J.I.C. even thought that it was probable that Germany "will not confine herself to this area, but will try to force transport into the Humber and the Tyne". Neither the quantity of land forces, nor even that of shipping, were

38. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 8 & 9 June 1940, op. cit.

39. C.B 80/12 CCS(40)432(JIC), also JIC(40)101: op cit., 6 June 1940.

expected to be limiting factors to the Germans. The first wave, estimated at five divisions complete with A.F.V.s, perhaps some 75,000 men, carried in 200 to 250 merchant vessels or small craft, and with an adequate naval escort and ample air support, would be rushed across to seize beaches and capture a port. Finally, if this first wave were successfully landed, the J.I.C. expected that Germany:

".... will endeavour by sea and air action to neutralise our Fleet in order to secure her communications with the first wave, and to enable her to maintain and reinforce the troops already landed." 40.

The Chiefs of Staff, studying this report on 7th June, agreed with the J.I.C.'s findings in general, but emphasised the dangers of a seaborne attack, considering that it might possibly coincide with, or even precede, the other forms of attack "in view of Hitler's tendency towards the unorthodox, and therefore the unexpected". 41. General Ironside, too, was chiefly worried about the dangers from seaborne attacks, particularly if the enemy landed at several points and achieved a measure of surprise, and most especially in view of the inadequacies of his own troops:

"Seaborne attacks will be of a much more serious nature. It is possible to make surprise landings, however vigilant are our air and sea patrols. They may be carried out at many points, thus confusing the commander in his judgement as to which are feint attacks and which the real ones. All may be intended as attempts to gain a footing, with a view to exploiting any success gained. Several landings will tend to confuse the defending commander and make him disperse his troops and so prevent him from crushing a landing at its conception.

The enemy now has very definite advantages over his predecessors. He now has the use of many fast motorboats and special craft for landing, that he has been preparing for many years. He has the choice of many landing-places and he has the advantage of combining his seaborne attack with airborne attacks.

There still remains the difficulty for the enemy that a seaborne expedition is a risky affair. Unless it has luck it may come to hopeless grief, through failing to achieve surprise, through bad weather, or through lack of experience in preparation. The balance of chance that the landing-places available, beaches, coves, piers and small harbours, is very large. We are forced to disperse our troops to oppose the actual landing owing to the existence of so many landing-places, and in our case we are forced to disperse still further owing to the lack of training and equipment of our troops. We dare not hold back and concentrate, both because our troops are not fit to attack, and in many cases can only be trusted to act defensively, and because we dare not give the enemy any elbow room. Our Country is a small one and armoured troops can penetrate at a prodigious speed." 42.

40. CAB 80/12 COS(40)432(JIC), also JIC(40)101: op cit., 6 June 1940.

41. CAB 79/4 COS(40)172nd:3, 7 June 1940.

42. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 9 June 1940, op. cit.

Writing to the C.I.G.S. on 11th June, about the J.I.C.'s report, General Ironside warned:

"Clearly with the forces I at present have available, it would not be possible to prevent invasion by those which can be employed for this purpose by the enemy, unless the Navy and Air Force can very largely reduce the scale of attack and prevent reinforcement of any initial success; but I am not informed of the extent to which this is likely. We cannot as yet predict the date at which Germany may begin operations against Great Britain, but we cannot afford to risk any delay in our preparations to meet them, seeing what the state of our defences is at the present time....

I therefore urge as a vital necessity that not one hour be lost in completing the B.E.F. to strength in personnel, in re-equipping it and then in moving formations to the areas I have planned.... I must be informed of when all this will be completed, so that I may plan ahead to meet the greatest danger in the history of the British Empire." 43.

The Prime Minister, however, was more critical of the scale of seaborne attack and tended to take a far too optimistic viewpoint. General Ironside, summoned to see him on 14th June, afterwards recalled in his diary:

".... he tackled me about my answer to the War Office upon their paper giving me the scale of offensive by the Germans of five divisions. He was indignant and said that the Navy could stop that. I thought to myself that with France out of it we might well have more than that coming against us." 44.

Indeed, General Ironside's fears seemed to be confirmed, as the Joint Planning Sub Committee, reviewing the J.I.C.'s estimates on 17th June, was to add that the Germans might use, in calm weather, some 800-1,000 self-propelled barges with a capacity of up to 150 tons each and capable of 8-9 knots; 24 train ferries, which might be used to carry tanks across so that they could be unloaded onto open beaches by means of rafts; and 50 M.T.B.s which could be supplemented further by large numbers of Italian M.T.B.s moved to the coast by rail. The J.P.C. was to conclude:

"We feel that, if the enemy succeed in achieving a high degree of air superiority before she launches her seaborne attack, the scale of that attack may considerably exceed that of five divisions...." 45.

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43. CAB 106/1202: op. cit., CRHF 1/1074/5: Memorandum to the C.I.G.S. from C.-in-C., Home Forces, 11 June 1940.

44. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 14 June 1940, op. cit.

45. CAB 80/13 COS(40)471(JP), also JP(40)253: Seaborne and Airborne Attack on the U.K., Report by J.P.C., 17 June 1940.

The J.I.C. thought that Fifth Column activities might occur at any stage of a German invasion. These might take many forms; for example, spying and passing information to enemy forces; indication of bombing targets by pre-arranged signals; demoralising the population by spreading false news or subversive pamphlets; the sabotage of factories, particularly munition and aircraft factories, or of dockyards, public utilities, vulnerable points on railways or transport, communication centres, such as W/T or R.D.F. stations, broadcasting stations and telephone exchanges; the release and possibly even arming of internees and prisoners of war; and, finally, active help to the invading enemy forces, including firing on troops, supply columns and refugees, to create a climate of confusion and panic. ⁴⁶. To reduce the threat posed by the Fifth Column, all aliens were being excluded from a defined coastal strip and from the vicinity of important bases or installations, while many German and Austrian nationals had already been interned in camps; and, on Italy's declaration of war on 10th June, the Prime Minister had immediately instructed the Minister of Home Security, Sir John Anderson, to intern all male Italians in the Country. ⁴⁷. Many were soon to be shipped to Canada. The Chiefs of Staff, however, still had cause to complain on 19th June that:

".... out of approximately 76,000 male and female Germans in this Country, only 12,000 have been interned, and out of 18,000 Italians, about 4,500 have been interned. To leave such a considerable proportion of enemy aliens at large at such a time as this seems to us to be taking unwarranted risks.

From the purely military point of view, we consider that all enemy aliens should be detained forthwith, on the understanding that those who could be proved beyond all doubt to be harmless could be released subsequently." ⁴⁸.

This policy of 'guilty until proved innocent' was all very well in the circumstances, but, in fact, the main problem was simply one of accommodating so many internees in the British Isles. Added to this, was the danger from the I.R.A. and from the British Union of Fascists, the Communist Party and other disaffected British subjects, very few of which had yet been rounded up, not to mention a flood of thousands of civilian refugees and Allied soldiers from the Continent, any of whom might be infiltrated enemy agents.

46. CAB 80/12 COS(40)432(JIC), also JIC(40)101: op. cit., 6 June 1940.

47. CAB 65/7 WM(40)161st:6, 11 June 1940.

48. CAB 66/8 WP(40)213, also COS(40)471: Urgent Measures to Meet Attack, Report by COS, 19 June 1940.

Reports of Fifth Column activities had indeed been flooding in throughout the period of uncertainty accompanying and following the Dunkirk evacuation. Even Vice Admiral Ramsey, busy directing this very operation, had reported from Dover on 31st May that there were:

"Indications of numerous acts of sabotage and Fifth Column activity in Dover, e.g. communications leakages, fixed defences sabotage, second-hand cars purchased at fantastic prices and left at various parking places." 49.

Anything even remotely suspicious or out of the ordinary was eagerly reported by a jittery and over-enthusiastic public, or by the police and the military, often in a highly exaggerated or embellished form. It was extremely rare to establish anything definite and very difficult to separate the truth from fiction, yet the threat seemed to be very real at the time. General Ironside noted on the same day:

"Fifth Column reports coming in from everywhere. A man with an arm-band on and a swastika pulled up near an important aerodrome in the Southern Command. Important telegraph poles marked, suspicious men moving at night, all over the country. We have the right of search and I have put pickets on all over the place tonight. Perhaps we shall catch some swine." 50.

The newly formed Local Defence Volunteers, indeed, proved an ideal force for the task of searching for suspicious people and keeping watch for parachutists in even the remotest districts. Members of the Mid-Devon Hunt, for example, patrolled Dartmoor on horseback, armed with shotguns and sporting only their L.D.V. armbands for a uniform. The experiences of the 4th Essex Battalion, Local Defence Volunteers, in the Hornchurch area of Essex were typical:

"June 1940 was a month of scares and rumours. Several times, detachments had to be conveyed in borrowed lorries to outlandish places to make all night searches for paratroops who existed only in the imaginations of the rumour mongers. But no chances were taken; the rumours were symptomatic of the time and there was always the possibility that they might be true. It was therefore the duty of the Local Defence Volunteers to ensure that their small part of Britain remained invulnerable." 51.

49. Fleming, Peter: Invasion 1940, p. 62, Hart-Davis, London, 1957.

50. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 31 May 1940, op. cit.

51. Graves, Charles: The Home Guard of Britain, p. 209, Hutchinson, London, 1943.

Nebulous reports continued to flow in, even for some time after the Dunkirk evacuation was complete. One of the favourite subjects, never properly explained, was that of flashing lights seen near aerodromes, especially during air-raids. On 9th June, the War Cabinet heard that:

"There had been a recrudescence of reports of suspicious activities around aerodromes, including alleged signals by lights. There was a widespread belief that there was real foundation for them. As a result, 'parashooters' had been ordered out." 52.

These particular reports continued to persist. A couple of weeks later, on 25th June, General Ironside, complaining to the Chiefs of Staff Committee that "there were still a considerable number of aliens who had not yet been removed from the 'dangerous' areas", added that:

"Numerous reports had been received from all sources of light signals fired from the ground near aerodromes, etc.. All military and R.A.F. units were trying to catch the people who were making these signals, but there had been so far no success. On the evidence available, however, there seemed to be no doubt that Fifth Column activities of this nature were in fact going on." 53.

However, by the end of the month only a very few suspected persons had been arrested and no positive evidence had come to light that any large-scale Fifth Column activities were in operation. General Ironside's "pickets" had had little success in the hunt for the elusive Fifth Column and he was already sceptical of its existence. As early as 9th June, he noted:

"Do what we can, we have not been able to discover the Headquarters - if such exists - of any alien Fifth Column...."

Later, on 2nd July, he admitted privately:

"It is extraordinary how we get circumstantial reports of Fifth Column and yet we have never been able to get anything worth having. One is persuaded that it hardly exists." 54.

In fact, despite all these reports and rumours, it was not officially concluded until much later, that there was scarcely any Fifth Column in the Country.

52. CAB 65/7 WM(40)159th:2, 9 June 1940.

53. CAB 79/5 COS(40)193rd:2, 25 June 1940.

54. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 9 June & 2 July 1940, op. cit.

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One of the major pre-occupations of both the War Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff in June, and indeed throughout the summer of 1940, was that of the dangers that a German invasion of the Republic of Ireland would entail to the security of the United Kingdom. On 30th May, Neville Chamberlain, Lord President of the Council, warned the War Cabinet that "it seemed that the I.R.A. forces were by themselves almost strong enough to overrun the weak Eire forces", and two days later, as the War Cabinet examined a report by the Chiefs of Staff on the dangers posed by a possible German invasion of Ireland, he argued that:

".... we ought to be ready to send over forces immediately, if the Germans attempted to seize places in Eire, so as to dislodge them before they had established themselves." 55.

The Chiefs of Staff's report stressed the inability of Eire to defend itself effectively against even a small-scale German attack. The Irish Army was poorly equipped and comprised only 8,000 regulars. There was virtually no air force and no navy whatsoever. Coast watching was inefficient and there were only a handful of anti-aircraft guns in the whole of Eire. There were many German sympathisers in Southern Ireland and no attempt had been made to intern them, indeed Eire still maintained diplomatic relations with Germany and there was no restriction on the diplomatic immunity of trans-missions to Germany. Previous discussions in May with the Irish Prime Minister, Eamon De Valera, though, had made the Irish Government more aware of the danger and the Irish Prime Minister had given an assurance on 23rd May to Viscount Caldecote, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, that "Eire would fight the Germans if she were attacked and would immediately call upon the United Kingdom for help". However, because of his insistence on a policy of Irish neutrality until actually attacked and Irish forces were engaged, and due to the "political consequences" if this neutrality were infringed by the British, De Valera had been absolutely adamant that there was "no question that Eire could invite in British troops before a German descent had begun". De Valera had, though, suggested secret consultations between the Irish Military authorities and the British Service staffs, with a view to arranging concerted military action if a German landing arose. The British had agreed and had already taken advantage of

55. CAB 65/7 WM(40)147th:3, 30 May 1940; and WM(40)151st:13, 1 June 1940.

these to urge the Eire Government to adopt certain precautionary measures against air-raids, German airborne and seaborne landings, and Fifth Columnists. Nevertheless, these precautionary measures, the Chiefs of Staff concluded:

".... will not secure Eire against the dangers that threaten her. Until she abandons her attitude of neutrality, she cannot fully safeguard herself against the danger of enemy activities within her territory, nor obtain the full co-operation of our forces to anticipate and resist attack. Unless this security can be achieved, Eire will remain a serious weakness in the defence of these Islands." ⁵⁶.

Discussing this report on 1st June, the War Cabinet welcomed the view that "the moment the Germans attempted to land troops in Eire, the Country would rally to our side", but they were reluctant to admit that:

".... in present circumstances we could not hope that the Eire Government would allow us to co-operate openly in the defence of Eire, unless Eire was attacked." ⁵⁷.

Despite this, talks with the Irish Government were to continue in an effort to persuade the Irish to change their position.

Besides the scale of attack on Great Britain, the Joint Intelligence Committee's report of 6th June also examined that which the Germans might bring to bear on Ireland. They expected this to be relatively small, but warned that an invasion of Eire might form an important element in the German plan to invade the United Kingdom, especially as a diversion to draw off part of an already much overstretched Home Forces and Royal Navy. "Ireland," they considered in their report,

".... is particularly favourable for an air landing in view of the I.R.A. organisation and of known German activities. Germany might, therefore, attempt to establish herself in Ireland with the object of attacking our Western ports and shipping in the Western approaches. It is not considered that such attacks would be carried out in any force, as the Eire Government could put up little resistance, and supplies for large air and air defence forces would have to be brought in by sea. Furthermore, the numbers of troop-carrying aircraft available for Ireland are likely to be limited by the German need to reserve the main portion of their air transport fleet for the main blow - the invasion of Great Britain.

56. CAB 66/8 WP(40)183, also COS(40)410: Eire - Report by the COS Committee, 30 May 1940.

57. CAB 65/7 WM(40)151st:13, 1 June 1940.

There is evidence that Germany is deliberately stressing the threat to Ireland with the object of encouraging a dispersion of our forces."

While the J.I.C. considered that an invasion of Ireland by air was possible, they thought that there was much less likelihood of a seaborne attack:

"Reports have been received of projected seaborne landings in Ireland from Spain, but there is no evidence that these have been planned, and at present these reports are open to doubt. It seems possible, however, that we may expect a feint against Ireland in order to draw our fleet away from the main seaborne expedition." 58.

The Chiefs of Staff's Committee, however, meeting the following day, criticised these assumptions, saying that,

".... the report did not sufficiently stress the dangers of an attempt to invade Ireland and use that country as a base for attack on our West Coast."

There was also the danger such an invasion of Eire would pose to Northern Ireland, where there were industries vital to the war effort, quite apart from its being part of the United Kingdom. The Chiefs of Staff urged that:

"Some troops, in addition to those already stationed in Northern Ireland, should be earmarked for immediate action against any forces that obtained a footing in Southern Ireland. The two brigades of Royal Marines were suited to this role and, if stationed near a convenient West Coast port and if the necessary sea transport was held in readiness at that point, they should be able to reach Ireland within about twelve hours of the initial German landing. Their employment against other possible objectives, such as the Canary Islands, was not excluded." 59.

Indeed, the J.I.C. were shortly to admit that up to one German division, say 15,000 men, might be used to invade Eire by sea, carried by German or neutral merchant vessels from Spain, or even Western France, together with anti-aircraft guns to protect aerodromes and heavy guns for coastal defence, and that perhaps 1,000 airborne troops, including parachutists, would be employed. 60. In addition, small forces might be landed from submarines

58. CAB 80/12 COS(40)432(JIC), also JIC(40)101: op. cit., 6 June 1940.

59. CAB 79/4 COS(40)172nd:3, 7 June 1940.

60. CAB 80/13 COS(40)465(JIC), also JIC(40)121: Seaborne and Airborne Attack on the U.K., Report by J.I.C., Annexe A, 15 June 1940.

and fishing vessels. Thus, despite the relatively small scale of attack expected on Ireland, compared with that on Great Britain, further precautions to prevent it would have to be taken.

As the Germans completed their conquest of Western France, and France entered its death throes, the danger to Ireland, not to mention England, appeared to grow even more acute. The talks with Eamon De Valera, however, though impressing him with the British Government's view of imminent invasion, soon came to nothing. Even the bargaining counter of the British Government's accepting, "in principle" and subject to the agreement of Lord Craigavon, the Ulster leader, some sort of arrangement in favour of a United Ireland in exchange for British use of Atlantic ports such as Berehaven, the stationing of British troops and R.A.F. units in Eire, and immediate action by the Irish Authorities against the I.R.A., Germans and Italians in that country, completely failed to move the Irish from their insistence on neutrality until actually attacked and their resolve to resist any belligerent by force, while the ideas mooted for a 'United Ireland' only succeeded in upsetting the Ulster politicians. The Eire Government also asked for arms, but the British Government were reluctant to supply more than a token amount of arms to the Irish Army, partly because of the general dearth of arms in the United Kingdom, in any case, but also, perhaps less credibly, because of the intransigent Irish attitude which fostered the fear that such arms might easily fall into the hands of subversive elements, such as the I.R.A., who would not hesitate to use them against any British forces, whether entering Eire or not.⁶¹ Neville Chamberlain, who as Lord President of the Council had been responsible for supervising the negotiations, considered that the chief reason for De Valera's attitude was in reality that,

".... their people were really almost completely unprepared for war.... They had not a well-equipped army, nor had they guns to resist tanks and mechanised troops. Dublin was practically an undefended city, where there were only a few anti-aircraft guns and no air-raid shelters or gas masks for the citizens. The people would be mercilessly exposed to the horrors of modern war, and he could not have it on his conscience that in this state of affairs he had taken the initiative in an action which led to war."⁶²

61. CAB 65/7 WM(40)168th:5, 16 June 1940; WM(40)173rd:9, 20 June 1940; WM(40)182nd:1, 25 June 1940; WM(40)186th:1, 28 June 1940; and CAB 65/8 WM(40)189th:9, 1 July 1940; WM(40)191st:11, 2 July 1940.

62. CAB 66/9 WP(40)223: Eire - Negotiations with Mr. De Valera, Memorandum by the Lord President of the Council, 25 June 1940.

Thus it was that undue pressure could not be put on Northern Ireland to consent to union without inflaming passions in the North, while any attempt by British forces to enter Eire and occupy ports in advance of German aggression, or even to supply large quantities of arms to the Irish Army, could not be made without the risk of inflaming active resistance in the South. On 6th July, the War Cabinet finally had to admit defeat and "authorised the Lord President to inform Lord Craigavon that the negotiations with the Eire Government were now at an end".⁶³ The Irish problem, as usual, seemed to defy solution.

Nevertheless, even while these discussions were still in progress, measures were already afoot to strengthen the British forces that could intervene in the event of a German invasion of Eire, either from Northern Ireland or from the mainland of Britain. The Chiefs of Staff had strongly recommended that further troops should be placed in readiness for possible operations in Eire as early as 7th June, while on 21st June Winston Churchill told the Defence Committee that,

".... we must accept the prospect of the Germans being able to get into Eire before us, but as soon as this took place we must be ready to pounce upon them with strong forces from every quarter at once, with the least possible delay."

Indeed, the Chiefs of Staff had concluded on the previous day that,

".... first priority should be given to the requirements for dealing with a German invasion of Eire, which in their opinion was the most serious menace outside the United Kingdom."⁶⁴

Already on 15th June, the partially trained and equipped second-line Territorial 61st (South Midland) Division, previously in the Oxford area, had been ordered to move to Northern Ireland District at short notice, less its divisional artillery, Royal Engineer and other services, starting at noon the next day, and by 20th June it was concentrated in Ulster.⁶⁵ This division, now comprising only 7,000 infantrymen, was to take over the role of the static defence of Northern Ireland from 53rd (Welsh) Division, and was to

63. CAB 65/8 WM(40)195th:11, 6 July 1940.

64. CAB 79/4 COS(40)172nd:3, 7 June 1940; and CAB 69/1 DO(40)18th:2, 21 June 1940.

65. WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940.

supplement the 8,000 defence troops in Ulster. The latter comprised some 5,000 men in infantry training centres, one Home Defence battalion, a second Home Defence battalion being raised, and the troops of A.D.G.B. and those manning the Belfast port defences. Also in Ulster were the Irish Horse with their 15 armoured cars, who were soon joined by the 2nd Fife & Forfar Yeomanry. Thus relieved, the 53rd (Welsh) Division, a first-line Territorial formation, became available "for mobile operations, if called upon, in support of Eire". Organised into three brigade groups, the 14,000 strong 53rd (Welsh) Division was, by 20th June, being placed on a fully motorised basis, with motor transport in the process of being provided. In addition, a Royal Marine Brigade, of some 2,500 men, was moved to Milford Haven,

".... ready to move at the shortest notice by the 22nd June; ships will be standing by. The destination of this brigade would have to be settled in the light of information received as to the enemy's action. Its role would be to seize a bridgehead for the landing of further troops."

This bridgehead was at first likely to be an Irish port and, to exploit this gain, one Regular division was "being held in readiness in the United Kingdom to follow up the Royal Marine Brigade as quickly as possible".⁶⁶ Two squadrons of Battle bombers were to move to Northern Ireland to co-operate with the troops by making air attacks on the points of enemy landings. These would replace the improvised squadrons that had been made up from training establishments. Further R.A.E. support could be quickly supplied from the British mainland. The Defence Committee also agreed, on 21st June, that a commander of all the British land forces which would operate in Eire "should be appointed immediately".⁶⁷

These arrangements, involving over 31,000 troops in an attacking role, backed by another 15,000 for static defence, would, it was hoped, be more than enough to deal with the maximum of 15,000 seaborne and 1,000 airborne troops which it was estimated the Germans might send to Eire to co-operate with perhaps 2,000 well armed sympathisers and members of the I.R.A.. However, it would be a while before these arrangements would become fully effective and certain flaws were already apparent. The 53rd (Welsh) Division had not yet completed its training, nor was it fully equipped. It was to be

66. CAB 80/13 COS(40)473: Eire - Revised Draft Report by COS Committee, 19 June 1940; and COS(40)479: Eire - Plans to Meet a German Invasion, Aide Memoire, 20 June 1940.

67. CAB 69/1 DO(40)18th:2, 21 June 1940.

1st July before all the necessary motor transport could be provided. In the meantime, one of its brigade groups would have to move south by train.⁶⁸ The Royal Marine Brigade were only capable of seizing a bridgehead, since they "had little or no transport of their own and would not be suitable to undertake operations far inland". At first they lacked field artillery and A.A. guns. They would also be wrongly placed to counter a possible German landing, perhaps from Norway, on the northern half of the coastline of Ireland, though, by the beginning of July, Northern Ireland itself would be chosen as the bridgehead for operations.⁶⁹ Finally, the 3rd Regular Division, which was the division selected to be held in readiness in Britain, had just been moved, on 19th June, to the West Sussex Coast, which would mean a very long time would elapse before it could land in Ireland. This formation, in fact, was,

".... at present the only fully equipped Regular reserve in the United Kingdom. Its three brigade groups were being trained for various offensive operations, but the division was not definitely earmarked for Eire. If it was to go at short notice, it would have to be moved nearer to the West Coast, and ships would have to be made available for it at short notice."⁷⁰

Thus, the British capacity to intervene effectively in force in Southern Ireland at this time, and indeed throughout the following month at least, was in actual fact very limited, the handicap of having to send reinforcements across the Irish Sea being particularly evident, with all the time-consuming loading and unloading of troops, stores and equipment that this would involve, not to mention the necessity of having to assemble adequate shipping in a very short space of time. Time was the key to the whole matter. The drawbacks were to give continuing cause for concern. The Chiefs of Staff commented on the arrangements in June:

"In spite of these resources the situation is very serious and it seems certain that, unless strong British forces can be stationed in Eire before any invasion takes place, a large part of the country at any rate must be overrun before help can arrive."⁷¹

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68. CAB 80/13 COS(40)479: op. cit., 20 June 1940.

69. CAB 79/5 COS(40)189th:3, 21 June 1940; and CAB 79/5 COS(40)203rd:1, Annexe, 1 July 1940.

70. CAB 69/1 DO(40)18th:2, 21 June 1940.

71. CAB 80/13 COS(40)473: op. cit., 19 June 1940.

It was by now becoming obvious that France could no longer hold out against the German forces that were advancing ever deeper into her interior. On 16th June, the French Prime Minister, Paul Reynaud, resigned and at noon the next day the new leader, the veteran Marshal Pétain, announced over the radio to the French nation, "It is with a broken heart that I tell you today that fighting must cease." Britain, the last bastion of resistance to the Germans in Western Europe, backed only by her far-flung Empire, would henceforth have to continue the fight alone, and by herself attempt to defeat all the massive forces that a triumphant and immensely powerful Germany could throw against her skies and her shores, in order to survive. Nothing daunted, the British Prime Minister was determinedly preparing the country for just this task. At 4 p.m. on 18th June, Winston Churchill rose in the House of Commons to deliver his immortal speech. He concluded:

"What General Weygand called the 'Battle of France' is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin.... The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the War. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth lasts for a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour.'" 72.

Just four days later, on 22nd June, the French finally put their signatures to the surrender document. General Ironside commented:

"So ends France in under two months. A dreadful disaster for a great nation. Shall we be the same? The Battle of Britain begins...." 73.

72. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., pp. 198-199.

73. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 23 June 1940, op. cit.

CHAPTER 7: 'PILLBOX MANIA': THE IRONSIDE PLAN

The prospects of an immediate invasion had receded somewhat as the divisions of the B.E.F. had returned from Dunkirk and as the German offensive on France was renewed, but a fortnight later, with the French suing for an armistice, the War Cabinet were again warned that an invasion of the U.K. was imminent. The "Certain Eventuality" that the Chiefs of Staff had foreseen in their report of 25th May, had now come to pass and France had fallen. Stressing the importance of a successful air defence to offset the weaknesses of the Army at home, this previous report had listed unrestricted air attack aimed at breaking public morale, starvation of the Country by attack on shipping and ports, or occupation by invasion, as the three main strategies that the Germans might use to break down the resistance of the United Kingdom. Just a few days before, on the 13th June, a telegram had been drafted to the Dominion Prime Ministers on these lines. Now, however, on 19th June, the Chiefs of Staff were positive that the option of invasion offered the quickest and most final method. Urging the War Cabinet that all their previous recommendations which had not yet been carried out, especially ruthless action to eliminate any chances of Fifth Column activities, should be "pressed on with day and night", they warned that:

"Experience of the campaign in Flanders and France indicates that we can expect no period of respite before the Germans may begin a new phase of the war. We must, therefore, regard the threat of invasion as immediate.

.... In now emphasizing the immediate threat of invasion, we must not overlook the fact that a major air offensive against this Country will almost certainly take place as well, and will tax our air defences and the morale of our people to the full.

The Germans have accepted prodigious losses in France, and are likely to be prepared to face even higher losses and to take even greater risks than they took in Norway to achieve decisive results against this Country. The issue of the War will almost certainly turn upon our ability to hold out during the next three months." 1.

The forces available to General Ironside to deal with this "immediate" threat of invasion, had received some welcome additions during the last few days and were to receive more before the end of the month and, though not all of these were to be immediately released by the War Office for Home Defence, they would be under his command in the event of actual operations

1. CAB 66/8 WP(40)213, also COS(40)471: Urgent Measures to Meet Attack, Report by the COS, 19 June 1940.

and could meanwhile be included in his defence plans. The independent 24th Guards Brigade had been evacuated from Narvik itself by 8th June, together with much of its equipment. It was soon being completed to full equipment in the London area, joining the depleted 20th Guards Brigade which was still re-organising there, following its stand at Boulogne late in May. The Regular 15th Infantry Brigade, located on the Scottish Borders, was one of the very few formations in the United Kingdom to be already completely equipped and mobile, and had rejoined its parent 5th Division.² On 14th June, Lieutenant General Sir Alan Brooke, who had arrived to take command of the British forces in Western France from Lieutenant General Sir Henry Karslake only on the previous day, gave orders for the evacuation of these forces in France, because of the continuing collapse of French resistance. Over the next few days, British forces were shipped out of the French western ports of Cherbourg, St. Malo, Brest, St. Nazaire, Nantes and La Pallice, and by noon on 22nd June a grand total of 136,500 British troops, including 2,500 wounded, had been landed in the United Kingdom from Western France, together with some 4,739 vehicles and 322 guns of all types, including many valuable 25 pdr. field guns. These troops included the uncommitted and virtually untouched 1st Canadian Division and the little damaged 52nd (Lowland) Division, both of which would greatly bolster Home Forces. However, the 1st Armoured Division had returned in disarray, having saved only a tiny handful of its tanks, while the remainder included the mauled remnants of the portions of 12th (Eastern) and 46th (North Midland and West Riding) 'labour' Divisions, and a host of improvised fighting formations and lines-of-communication troops, which had been cut off from the original B.E.F.. Also a great deal of transport had some of the guns of all these formations had been lost, much of these needlessly so in the panic of the evacuations.³ In addition, some 17,600 Polish troops, 3,700 Czechs, 1,200 Dutch, 1,100 Norwegians, 600 Belgians and 12,000 French troops had been landed in the United Kingdom by 22nd June or shortly afterwards, though many of these would have to be formed into organised units before they could be useful, while most of the French troops were unwilling to continue the fight and had to be repatriated to the French Colonies, and some 500 of the Czechs had soon to be interned. Nevertheless, the Polish troops were already in the process of being formed into two mixed brigades to the south of Glasgow by the end of the following

2. CAB 69/1 DO(40)15th:2, 10 June 1940.

3. Karslake, Basil: 1940: The Last Act, pp. 189 & 236-240. Leo Cooper, London, 1979.

month. ⁴ A further very important addition to Home Forces were some 9,500 troops of the Australian Infantry Force and 6,500 men of the New Zealand contingent, which had been generously sent by their respective Commonwealth governments. These arrived by convoy at the Clyde on 16th June and were immediately formed into brigade groups in Wiltshire and N.E. Hampshire, respectively, but, though excellent infantry, they still had to be supplied with heavy equipment by their hosts.

Thus there were in Great Britain on 20th June, counting the remnants of 51st (Highland) Division of which little more than a single brigade had been rescued from France, no less than 28 infantry divisions, two armoured divisions, one armoured reconnaissance brigade, four Army Tank brigades, two independent infantry brigade groups, and several independent Army or Royal Marine infantry brigades, plus a further two infantry divisions in Northern Ireland. (See Map 6.) There were, on this date, even excluding the 36,200 Allied troops and almost 600,000 men of the Local Defence Volunteers who were still largely a "broomstick army", no less than 1,313,000 men under arms in the whole of the United Kingdom. The latter figure comprised 595,000 troops with the Field Army, including the returned B.E.F., 42,600 with the Home Defence battalions, 49,000 with the Holding battalions or being used to make Field Force units up to strength, 13,000 in Coastal Defence, 151,000 in A.D.G.B., 365,000 in Training units, half of which were due to make up Field Force units, 59,400 in various miscellaneous establishments and 38,000 Dominion troops, including the 22,000 Canadians, and 16,000 Australians and New Zealanders. Of the grand total, however, the 164,000 men of the Coastal and Air Defences, and some 220,000 men of the R.A.S.C., R.A.O.C. and R.A.M.C. were not trained to fight, while a further 150,000 had less than two months' service. ⁵ The totals of formations in Great Britain too are much less impressive if it is remembered that 16 of the 28 infantry divisions were re-equipping and recovering from their ordeals in France and Norway, while the remaining 12 were also mostly severely short of equipment and mobility, not to mention training; that, of the two armoured divisions, one had only a few Cruiser tanks, while the other was almost entirely equipped with light tanks; that the armoured reconnaissance brigade was only just being equipped with improvised light armoured cars; that the

4. CAB 66/10 WP(40)281; also COS(40)562: Organisation of Allied Naval, Army and Air Contingents, Report by the C.O.S., 22 July 1940.

5. CAB 66/8 WP(40)210: Manpower in the Army, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 18 June 1940.

independent infantry brigades or brigade groups were but lightly equipped; and that, of the four Army Tank brigades, only one had even approaching half its proper strength of 150 infantry tanks. Even the total of 28 infantry divisions in Great Britain was very soon reduced to only 24 as one, the 49th (West Riding) Division, less its 148th Brigade which was to be sent to Ulster, departed on 26th June for Iceland, while three others were broken up towards the end of June or at the beginning of July. The equipment actually in the hands of the troops in the fighting formations, including those returned from Western France, amounted at this time to approximately 710 field guns, 198 medium and heavy guns, perhaps 263 towed anti-tank guns, 133 mobile Hotchkiss Naval guns on lorries, 291 tracked light tanks, some 185 of which were with 2nd Armoured Division, 38 'wheeled' light tanks, 39 Cruiser tanks which were being supplied to re-equip at first 3 R.T.R. and then the remainder of 1st Armoured Division, 81 infantry tanks, 754 Bren Carriers, 264 'scout carriers', about 10,000 Bren guns and 4,500 anti-tank rifles. Preparations were being made to use French 75 mm. guns, which it was hoped to receive from America. General Ironside, however, commented on the latter that, "The ammunition would require reconditioning, as it was very old, but it would be quite good enough for use at point blank range against tanks." ⁶. By contrast, the German forces on the Western Front totalled some 114 divisions, of which four were mechanised and no less than ten were armoured, with almost 2,500 tanks.

* * *

General Ironside was by now fully engaged in the process of re-organising the mass of troops and formations in Great Britain into an effective fighting instrument that would have a reasonable chance of dealing with any German attempt at invasion. His plans for the defence of the Country, too, had reached completion by this time. At first, General Ironside's defence plan had merely been an updated version of his predecessor's 'Julius Caesar' Plan, but with the twin elements of the Local Defence Volunteers and the 'Ironsides' with the mobile columns added in, together with a much increased emphasis on defending the coastline and its immediate hinterland against seaborne attack by means of wire, mines, anti-tank obstacles, pill-boxes, 'beach batteries', demolitions and roadblocks, and the obstruction of nearby landing grounds to prevent attack on the rear of the troops who were

6. CAB 106/1202: Memoranda Prepared for a Secret Session of the House of Commons on Home Defence: Troops Available in Great Britain, 18 June 1940; and CAB 69/1 DO(40)17th:1, 19 June 1940.

to man these defences. This approach had been outlined in the first Operational Instruction from G.H.Q. which had been issued to all Commands on 5th June, the only other major change being that of the codeword for "immediate readiness", which was altered from 'Caesar' to 'Cromwell'.

With the initial reconnaissances of the beaches completed and work on the coastal defence works proceeding in earnest, General Ironside's next priority was to look, in detail, to the inland defence of the Country and at how to deal effectively with the problem of what would happen if the Germans breached the initial coastal defence line and used tank columns to penetrate in depth, as they had in France. His greatest fear was that these enemy tank columns would run amok and "tear the guts out of the Country". Because of the lack of equipment and vehicles, and the under-trained state of most formations, there were few units which were fit for offensive operations and the great bulk of the Army had accordingly to be committed to static defence. General Ironside's solution to the problem of tank breakthroughs, therefore, had of necessity to be mainly a static one. His answer was to introduce a further new element into the plans for defence to supplement the combination of static defence in towns and villages and action by the mobile columns, that he already envisaged for the defence of the inland areas. This new element was a system of lines of defence which he called "stops" or "stoplines". A fresh Operational Instruction, No. 3, which covered the detailed policy for Home Defence was issued by G.H.Q. on 15th June and in this General Ironside outlined his train of thought:

"The general plan of defence is a combination of mobile columns and static defence by means of strong points and 'stops'. As static defence only provides limited protection of the most vulnerable points, it must be supplemented by the action of mobile columns. However mobile such columns may be, they cannot be expected to operate immediately over the whole area in which it is possible for the enemy to attempt invasion by sea or air. It is, therefore, necessary to adopt measures for confining his action until such time as mobile columns can arrive to deal with him. This will be done by means of 'stops' and strong points prepared for all-round defence at aerodromes, which are necessary to prevent the enemy obtaining air superiority, at the main centres of communication, and distributed in depth over a wide area covering London and the centres of production and supply. This system of 'stops' and strong points will prevent the enemy from running riot and tearing the guts out of the country as has happened in France and Belgium." 7.

7. WO 166/1: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, G.H.Q. Home Forces, June 1940. Appendix F: G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 3, 15 June 1940.

G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 3 went on to outline the nature of these "stops" in greater detail:

"The inland area will be divided into zones consisting of a series of 'stops', culminating in a zone selected to cover London and important industrial centres. This zone will be selected by G.H.Q.. Although it may not at the present time be possible to garrison all 'stops', they should all be prepared immediately and provided with necessary defensive weapons such as anti-tank obstacles, pillboxes, wire, static anti-tank guns and, where suitable, mines. The major proportion of the limited number of static anti-tank weapons at present available will be sited in these 'stops', the remainder being used for beach defence. Guns with sufficient mobility will be included in mobile columns. Anti-aircraft defence will also be fitted into the general framework of the zones and its use against A.F.V.'s as a secondary role will be considered."

Two categories of "stops" were envisaged. Firstly, defence lines were to make maximum use of efficient natural tank obstacles such as rivers and steep hills; canals, if local defence of the lock gates was undertaken so as to ensure their retention of water and carefully controlled inundations, would also be used where appropriate:

"It is essential that the fullest use of waterways must be made. In order to make efficient demolition belts, successive lines of bridge demolitions and the cratering of important road junctions are essential. Waterways at right angles to the general line of the front are of great value as they hinder lateral methods of the attack, they will always be included in the demolition scheme."

However, due to the long frontages of the "stops", added to the shortages of artillery, these stretches would at present have to be only lightly held in order to provide sufficient troops and artillery for the remainder of the zone where no natural tank obstacles existed. In this latter, second category, the "stops" would have to be provided by lines of static defences, including concrete pillboxes which would be sited, utilising also the improvised static anti-tank guns as well as those in the formations, to cover artificial tank obstacles such as ditches and mines, the whole being distributed in great depth:

"It cannot be too strongly emphasized that great depth in the anti-tank defence is of primary importance. The determined advance of a few tanks deep into the position is intended to create alarm and confusion; the effect of such penetration can be prevented by a resolute defence to avoid any widening of the gap." 8.

In fact, General Ironside had already given orders as early as 12th June that reconnaissances were to be undertaken "of a rear line and south line in Northern and Eastern Commands respectively to prevent the enemy running riot behind our main defences." ⁹. The same day he noted:

"We have now got down to dividing the Country into lines of defence. They must largely be lines of posts, defended villages and river lines. They are in all directions because one can never tell where the enemy may come from. He will try landings in many places and will exploit any successful one very quickly." ¹⁰.

Nevertheless, despite General Ironside's enthusiasm for the new element of "stops" in his defence plans, he little knew then how much this concept of linear static defences, positioned often a great way inland from the coast, was to provoke intense debate and controversy over the next few weeks or how the resulting loss of confidence in him was to lead to his eventual replacement.

At the same time, General Ironside was also struggling to build up again a suitably strong force in his G.H.Q. Reserve and, once collected, to hold on to the command of it. The departure of 52nd (Lowland) Division for Western France beginning on 7th June, followed by the 1st Canadian Division on 11th June, had temporarily left only 43rd (Wessex) Division in IV Corps in G.H.Q. Reserve. This division was supplemented on 13th June by 8 R.T.R., then situated on Salisbury Plain, but soon to be moved to Aldershot.

General Ironside wrote:

"War Office have released to me the 8th Tank Battalion at Tidworth with fifty 'I' tanks of old pattern and seven [teen?] light tanks. I have fixed up flats on the railway for them and they should be brought quickly wherever we want them. I am collecting a mobile reserve, if it is not taken away from me at once.

One's hopes go up and down as one collects something, and then has it taken away from one. The Reserve must be able to attack. If it cannot, it is not fit to be a reserve and had better be laid out statically, which is most uneconomical militarily. It is all a race for time to get something organised before we are attacked...." ¹¹.

9. WO 166/1: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, G.H.Q. Home Forces, June 1940.

10. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 12 June 1940, (Col. R. Macleod transcript).

11. *ibid.*, 13 June 1940.

Actually, 23 of the infantry tanks were the modern Matilda Mk. II, but this was still only a drop in the ocean. Further forces were outlined in G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 3 on 15th June:

"A G.H.Q. Reserve will be formed probably consisting in the first instance of one armoured division, less 'I' tanks, one battalion R.T.R. and two infantry divisions.

One portion of this reserve will be located north of the Thames and one portion south of the Thames. It will be made as mobile as possible and will not be used for static defence." 12.

The only armoured division immediately available was 2nd Armoured Division in Lincolnshire and within the next few days this was brought into G.H.Q. Reserve to bolster IV Corps and was moved to the Northampton area, from whence, aided by 1st Armoured Reconnaissance Brigade with its "Iron-sides" in Huntingdonshire, it could operate on "the flanks and the rear" of any enemy advancing inland from either the East Anglian or the Lincolnshire coast. (See Map 6.) An allotment of R.A.F. reconnaissance aircraft was to assist. 13. Unfortunately, consisting as it did of only about 178 machine-gun armed Vickers light tanks by the end of the month, this role could really be no more than a harrying one and would have little effect against any enemy column which included gun-armed tanks.

One of the infantry divisions, the 43rd (Wessex), situated in IV Corps in the Hertfordshire area, was already organised in brigade groups and was available for G.H.Q. Reserve. (See Map 6.) The other infantry division was selected to be the 1st Canadian Division, which had returned from Western France by 20th June and was reforming at Aldershot. On the 23rd, it began its move from Aldershot to a new "position of readiness" in G.H.Q. Reserve in the Oxford area, from whence it could strike effectively in any required direction. Here it was soon kept busy reconnoitring routes to likely points of enemy attack, its commander, Major General A. G. L. McNaughton, describing it as "a mobile reserve with a 360 degree front", which might have to operate "anywhere in Great Britain from the South Coast to Scotland, or in Wales". Like 43rd (Wessex), this division was organised in brigade and battalion groups, comprising mobile columns capable of rapid and flexible action, and was supposedly 100% mobile. However, 1st Canadian

12. WO 166/1: op. cit., Appendix F: op. cit., 15 June 1940.

13. WO 166/230: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, IV Corps, June 1940.

Division's ability to perform this task, which was one of enormous responsibility, was weakened by the fact that its 1st Canadian Brigade, which was the only portion of it actually to have landed in Western France, had lost almost all of its vehicles and had to remain immobile at Aldershot until it could be re-equipped; though, to compensate for this, its ancillary troops, including three invaluable artillery regiments with their full quota of twenty-four 25 pdr. field guns each, were formed into an additional "reserve" group.¹⁴ Also placed in G.H.Q. Reserve at this time were the newly arrived Australian and New Zealand brigade groups in Wiltshire and N.E. Hampshire, respectively, and by 19th June these were already being made 100% mobile by the provision of transport.¹⁵ The 52nd (Lowland) Division, which had suffered greater losses in equipment and transport in Western France than the 1st Canadian Division, was not reallocated to G.H.Q. Reserve on its return, but was instead sent to the Cambridge area on 20th June and was placed in Eastern Command Reserve.

These initial dispositions of G.H.Q. Reserve gave some extent of cover to East Anglia, but paid scant regard to the need for part of the Reserve to be situated south of the River Thames within reasonable distance of the Kent and Sussex coasts. (See Map 6.) The New Zealand contingent was too far inland effectively to undertake this role at short notice, while the tasks given to 1st Canadian Division in Oxfordshire were over-ambitious, to say the least. The mere handful of gun-armed tanks immediately available at Aldershot with 8 R.T.R. was almost laughable, while the reserves covering East Anglia lacked any 2 pdr. gun-armed tanks at all. It was not until 30th June that any significant moves were made to attempt to rectify these deficiencies in the composition and dispositions of the G.H.Q. Reserve. Nevertheless, a start had at least been made.

These initial movements of the G.H.Q. Reserves were just part of a whole series of moves of the various units and formations in Home Forces, for which orders were given on 16th June and which were to be continued throughout the next few days and indeed, in some cases, up to the beginning of July. These moves were in accordance with the re-organisation of the forces in Great Britain for the purposes of General Ironside's plan for resisting invasion. They were also made necessary by the fact that the

14. Stacey, Col. C. P.: The Canadian Army 1939-45. An Official History Summary, pp. 18-19. Dept. of National Defence, Ottawa, 1948.

15. CAB 69/1 DO(40)17th:1, 19 June 1940.

returned units and formations of the B.E.F. had originally been slotted into the pattern of dispositions with regard primarily to the ease of quickly reforming and re-equipping them from the military depots, rather than to the needs of Home Defence. Most movements were carried out by rail, because of the lack of road transport and because of the density and convenience of Britain's extensive railway system. There was no time to wait for units to receive adequate heavy equipment before moving them, but they were instructed at first that, "No movement will take place until units are complete in personal equipment." This instruction, however, caused some misunderstanding and delay. So, to clarify this and speed the re-organisation, this was amended on 22nd June to read that:

"Moves may take place as soon as units concerned are reasonably complete in personal equipment and should NOT be postponed to await completion where the amount of equipment concerned is small." 16.

The main moves at this time, besides those of the G.H.Q. Reserves, were as follows. (See Map 6.) To strengthen the defence of the South Coast, the 3rd (Regular) Division was moved from Frome in Somerset to the area of Midhurst-Brighton-Bognor Regis on the hitherto relatively unguarded West Sussex Coast on 19th June, though this division was immediately placed under War Office control "for special training", which might include despatch to Ireland. The 4th (Regular) Division was already in Hampshire with a brigade on the Isle of Wight; but to extend the defence of the coastline further to the west, in view of the German occupation of Western France, the 50th (Northumbrian) Division was moved to the Dorset coast from Western Command. In Western Command itself, the 38th (Welsh) Division was moved from South Wales up to Cheshire, thus allowing 2nd London Division to be moved on 24th June to replace it in South Wales. Both these were second-line Territorial formations that were urgently in need of further training in some of the best training areas. The battle-experienced 52nd (Lowland) Division, just back from France, replaced 2nd London Division in Eastern Command Reserve in Cambridgeshire. Within Northern Command, the 1st and 2nd Regular Divisions were moved to the coasts of Lincolnshire and the East Riding of Yorkshire, respectively, so as to fill the gaps left by the move of 2nd Armoured Division out of Lincolnshire, and by the second-line Territorial 66th (Lancs. and Borders) Division in East Riding, which was about to be broken up. The

16. WO 166/1: op. cit., Appendix E: Reforming of B.E.F., 16 June 1940; and Appendix J: Moves of Divisions, 22 June 1940.

44th (Home Counties) Division, which like the two Regular divisions had been to France, was removed from Southern Command and placed in support of these two in the Doncaster area, less a single brigade that was despatched to guard The Wash. Finally, on 28th June, the 48th (South Midland) Division was ordered from Western Command to the Severn area of Southern Command to replace 44th (Home Counties) Division. ¹⁷.

All of this first phase of movements was completed by 29th June. In the meantime, other reorganisations were in progress. Three motor machine gun brigades were in the process of formation, each comprising three divisional cavalry regiments which had returned from Dunkirk minus their equipment. The 1st Motor Machine Gun Brigade in Sussex was already almost complete and consisted of the 17/21st Lancers, the 16/5th Lancers and the 2nd Lothian and Border Horse, each of three squadrons mounted, at first, in Austin utility lorries equipped with Vickers heavy machine guns or Brens. The 2nd and 3rd M.M.G. Brigades soon followed, and all three were being equipped largely with the Humberette and Beaverette "Ironsides". Useful as these mobile columns would be, however, their heaviest weapon for dealing with tanks was only an anti-tank rifle.

A further important step during June, which followed on naturally from the reorganisation of Commands into field armies with their own operational Command H.Q.'s at the end of May, was the formation of the divisions and independent brigades into properly co-ordinated and supported Corps. (See Map 6.) The I, II and III Corps Headquarters had been in France and, on their return, had been re-established at Hickleton Hall near Doncaster in Northern Command, at Lower Hare Park near Newmarket in Eastern Command, and at the Old Rectory, Whitchurch, Salop, in Western Command, respectively. The IV Corps was already established as G.H.Q. Reserve with its headquarters at Guilsborough House near Northampton. By 14th June, a V Corps had been established with its temporary headquarters at Bhurtpore Barracks, Tidworth on Salisbury Plain in Southern Command; and next to be established were X, XI and XII Corps, with headquarters at Scotch Corner near Darlington in Northern Command, at Bishop's Stortford in East Anglia, and at Tunbridge Wells in the South East, respectively. Their respective commanders were

17. WO 166/1: op. cit., Appendix E: op. cit., 16 June 1940; and Appendix I: Distribution of Formations on Completion of Moves, 21 June 1940.

appointed and took up their posts, and the various units and formations were soon placed under their command. On 21st June, orders were issued to Commands for the moves of various field, medium and heavy artillery regiments to form the corps and army artillery elements and these moves took place over the following few days. 18.

If any properly mounted German invasion or expedition, therefore, could have taken place soon after Dunkirk, perhaps in the latter half of June, there is little doubt that it would have been an unqualified success, since it would have caught Home Forces off balance in the throes of a major reorganisation, as well as in an appallingly bad state of equipment. General Ironside was all too well aware of this. He commented, on 17th June:

"How soon will the Germans be able to start their attacks? They will be very stupid if they delay much longer."

He continued:

".... With all our units reforming, re-arming and moving into their new areas, we are in a pretty good confusion. I calculate that it will be nearly towards the end of the week before we can say that we are in position. It was unavoidable, with all these troops and materials coming back from the front. They were all put in place very hurriedly and the men of the B.E.F. were allowed to go on leave - in some cases 72 hours, which was a long time in the circumstances." 19.

While General Ironside was giving a good deal of his attention to the concept of static defence lines and G.H.Q. Reserves to protect the interior of the Country, and to the reorganisation, re-arming and redistribution of the units and formations of Home Forces for Home Defence, he had also not been neglecting the defence of the coastline and its immediate hinterland. G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 3, of 15th June, gave instructions on coastal areas as well:

"This should be regarded as an outpost zone, to give warning of, to delay and break up the initial attacks. Attempts to approach the ports and beaches in transports, and the disembarkation therefrom, will be hampered by the Fixed Defences, but these defences will require to be supplemented by other defence weapons, such as lighter artillery, small-arms, mines, etc. for their local protection.

18. WO 166/169-344: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, I-XII Corps, June 1940; and WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940.

19. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 17 June 1940, op. cit.

Since our resources will not permit the occupation of defensive positions to cover all possible landing beaches with fire, the defence of the latter will be confined to those which lend themselves to a landing in force with A.F.V.'s, particularly those which give access to important ports or objectives inland.

These beach defences will be reinforced by strong points in rear, designed primarily to hold up enemy A.F.V.'s, and giving facilities for all-round defence. Similarly, ports will be protected by all-round defence.

The principle must be to obtain early information and to hold mobile reserves ready to move to the threatened points and to attack the enemy."

The defence of the selected beaches was to be based on self-contained strong points centred around the 6" Naval gun 'beach batteries' now being mounted along the coastlines or situated at points on the beach, particularly at suitable tank exits, which might be considered to be especially vulnerable. Local defence of the beach batteries, by entrenched infantry carefully wired in, was very important, so that the gunners could concentrate without interference on their primary task of dealing with enemy transports attempting to land troops and A.F.V.'s. To guard the tank exits from beaches, one or more of the improvised anti-tank guns, mostly Naval 6 pdrs. or 4" guns, might be included in strong points, but since "the dissipation of a too great proportion of the limited number of guns in isolated points will result in a dangerous weakness in the main defensive system", it was instructed that the main defence against tanks would be provided by anti-tank mines "which, to be fully effective, must always be under the fire of the defence." Emphatic instructions were given as to both types of strong points:

"The task of these strong points will be to stop the enemy's A.F.V.'s and other troops at all costs, and from them there must be no withdrawal."

The remainder of the beaches was to be covered merely by coast watching and patrolling, including bicycle and motorcycle patrols, the "greatest attention" being paid to obtaining early information. This Operational Instruction, however, admitted:

"Reconnaissance reports show that the coastline from Newcastle-upon-Tyne down the East Coast and South Coast contains a very great number of beaches suitable for the landing of both troops and A.F.V.'s, and a strong defence of all of them is impracticable. We must therefore accept the possibility of the enemy being able to land in certain selected spots unopposed." 20.

General Ironside was soon made to realize just how great was the problem of adequately protecting even the most vulnerable stretches of coastline against enemy landings, as he began a series of visits, on 20th June, to inspect coastal defences, starting with East Anglia. He wrote:

"The whole of the day I made a reconnaissance from King's Lynn to Cromer, looking at the troops and their work guns and wire are being put up on all the likely points. Work will never end. It ought to have been begun months ago."

The next day, he continued his reconnaissance from Cromer round the coast to Southwold:

"An immense amount of work being done. An immense amount to be done still. Decentralisation to all the lesser commanders. All civilian contractors should be put to the work at this critical moment. No frills are necessary. The bottle-neck is the allotment of the work by the military. They are so apt to make a fuss about an intricate reconnaissance, and then never get any work done."

The defence of the hinterland of East Anglia, too, gave General Ironside much cause for concern:

"The great failure is to realize that all the nodal points inland must be fitted with blockhouses to cover big solid blocks. To restrict all movement in the country and so prevent enemy columns rushing about...." 21.

General Ironside was determined to get large numbers of civilian labourers, especially those of the local Councils and the larger building contractors, to aid the military in the construction of defence works, both on the coast and inland. On 17th June, he wrote:

"I have decided to start in with making all the Town Councils and Borough Councils to do work. It is stupid to have all their employees doing repair work on the roads, and cutting hedges and grass, when we want pill-boxes made. I must decentralise, but getting out instructions alone takes time. And all the troops are moving into their positions from where they were assembled. So few people can be spared to make reconnaissances." 22.

Two days later, he told a meeting of the Defence Committee, at which the Prime Minister was present, that:

21. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 20 & 21 June 1940, op. cit.

22. ibid., 17 June 1940.

"The system adopted was to decentralise as much as possible, and to make use of big contractors who were accustomed to handling large numbers, and had the machinery for organising and supervising the work. This was believed to be a much more satisfactory system than to attempt the direct employment of quantities of unskilled labour. The main bottleneck was reconnaissance, which was an indispensable preliminary to the start of work; otherwise much that was done would be wasted. About 150,000 men, and all the excavating machinery in the Country, were employed on the work. The whole coast had been surveyed, and had been divided into three grades:-

- (a) Places where tanks could land.
- (b) Places where infantry could land.
- (c) Places where a landing was almost impossible.

These categories were being tackled in that order, and work on the defences of the beaches was proceeding fast." 23.

The use of large civilian contractors, such as the well-known building firm of Taylor Woodrow of London, proved to be an immediate bonus. The commencement of work on defences could not be postponed while detailed reconnaissances were made, so the Chief Engineers of Commands often had to make snap decisions on the most urgent work as far as could be judged at the time and arrange for its execution by any means at their disposal, despite the risk of poor siting and uneconomical use of the defence works. One Chief Engineer rang up a big building contractor and asked him "to build 200 concrete pillboxes, hurriedly sited by the General Staff, on a 50 mile stretch of coastline, and to complete the job in three weeks". The contractor agreed and this work, on the South Coast, was apparently very nearly completed in the specified time, in spite of the great difficulties due to transport shortages. Similar efforts were made along much of the East, South-East and South Coasts, both by large contractors working under the direction of R.E. officers of the War Office Works Service or, to a lesser extent, by R.E. Units themselves; though inland many of the L.D.V.-manned local defences, such as concrete roadblocks covered by small pillboxes designed for riflemen and even parts of the main inland stoplines, were often erected by small local contractors or even by L.D.V. personnel acting under what little R.E. supervision that could be spared from the main defences. Such extemporised arrangements, combined with dual control by the War Office and G.H.Q. Home Forces, led to many mistakes which would not have occurred if previous planning had been possible, but even so much valuable work was carried out by the hard-pressed Royal Engineer organisation during this period, and soon formation R.E. officers became available

to take over much of the work burden of the Chief Engineers of Commands and to supervise closely most of the work by the civilian contractors in their own areas. ²⁴. Some 900 pillboxes were being constructed by civilian contractors in Kent alone by 25th June. ²⁵.

General Ironside had less success in getting civilian labour from the local Councils. On 22nd June, he complained:

"I have been held up over the getting of Town Councils and Borough Councils to work in with the military over necessary work. So many of them are already doing so, but the wretched central authority, the Home Office, does not seem to be able to get out the Instructions. We are still very unmilitary." ²⁶.

Three days later, though, at a meeting of the War Cabinet, General Ironside was able to answer Churchill's complaint that "only 57,000 civilian workers were employed on work of a military nature", by saying that "the number of civilians employed would be doubled, if not trebled, in the ensuing week". ²⁷.

Despite the virtual impossibility of constructing and manning defence works all along the whole coast, arrangements were at least complete for the watching of the entire coastline by coastguards and special coast watchers, so that "every bit of coastline would be seen every half hour throughout the day and night". The coast watchers would be in telephone communication with the nearest naval and military authorities, while behind them was the Observer Corps, which covered most of the country. General Ironside was also able to inform the Defence Committee on 19th June that a number of depth charges with electrical firing apparatus were now being employed on beach defences, while there was no shortage of barbed wire. The delivery of Army anti-tank mines had now reached the rate of 30,000 per week, while that of the heavier Admiralty anti-tank mine, which had 20 lb. of explosive, was 20,000 a week. ²⁸. The laying of these in minefields,

24. Pakenham-Walsh, Major General R. P., History of the Royal Engineers, Vol. VIII, 1938-1948, pp. 114-115, The Institution of Royal Engineers, Chatham, 1958.

25. CAB 79/5 COS(40)193rd:2, 25 June 1940.

26. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 22 June 1940, op. cit.

27. CAB 65/7 WM(40)181st:9, 25 June 1940.

28. CAB 69/1 DO(40)17th:1, 19 June 1940.

however, was the first large-scale practical experience that the British Army had in this type of warfare and lack of experience, combined with the hurried operation, led to many mistakes, many of which did not become apparent until later on. The drill for laying out, recording and marking the position of minefields had not yet been fully developed or practised, a drawback that led to great difficulty when it became necessary to alter or remove the fields. This difficulty was compounded by the fact that many minefields located on or near the beaches were soon covered by drifting sand that obliterated all traces of the markings, while individual mines buried in sandy soil could often move several yards. 29.

General Ironside was aware that all this emphasis in the coastal areas on completing the beach defences as soon as possible might lead to the dangerous attitude of 'Maginot-mindedness', whereby large numbers of troops would work frantically on construction and then sit idly in their prepared linear defences, watching the direction that the enemy might come from for days on end, completely neglecting the vital necessity for training in offensive operations. He took care to make the point to his subordinates that too much emphasis should not, therefore, be placed on their construction and defence, and that they should merely be held as an "outpost zone", as instructed in the G.H.Q. Operational Instruction of 15th June. On 22nd June, immediately following his visit to the East Anglian coast, he wrote:

"We are now engaged in putting up minor Maginot lines along the coast, but I have impressed upon the Corps Commanders that they are only meant as delaying lines, and are meant to give the mobile columns a chance of coming up to the threatened points."

Considering the overall picture, too, General Ironside continued:

"I have impressed upon the Government that they ought to be ready with offensive operations if we can see a reasonable chance of upsetting their efforts at invasion. To sit immobile here is the worst thing to do.... It is the weakness of waiting for an attack that preys upon people's minds. Waiting for an attack which may come in so many places. Even the stoutest heart begins to wonder whether he can meet all the eventualities he pictures to himself. I felt it myself as I went round the endless coastline of East Anglia yesterday. Still, we can meet these swine with stout hearts if we mean to defeat them. Right is on our side...." 30.

29. Pakenham-Walsh, Major General R. P., op. cit., p. 116.

30. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 22 June 1940, op. cit.

The Commander-in-Chief, therefore, continued to place great faith in the offensive role, which, in the context of anti-invasion planning, would firstly be provided by the mobile columns, mostly of brigade strength, acting in immediate support of the troops manning the static coastal defences. Despite the long frontages held by the divisions on the coastline, it would not be sound to lock up too many troops in a static role, and in any case the mobile columns provided the troops with an invaluable opportunity for important training in an attacking role, thus installing an aggressive offensive spirit which would relieve the tedium and boredom caused by the constant construction and manning of static defences. The mobile columns, too, would help to counter the worrying attitude of mind that General Dill warned the War Cabinet about at their meeting on 17th June, and which stemmed from the B.E.F.'s experiences on the Continent:

".... the retreats and withdrawals which we had recently been compelled to carry out must necessarily have left their mark on the psychology of our troops. We must once and for all cast behind us the spirit of 'looking over our shoulder' and of looking for a position to fall back on." 31.

Aggressive offensive tactics also appealed greatly to the Prime Minister. At this same meeting on 17th June, the War Cabinet had noted that whereas the British had in the past aimed at training the whole Army to a uniformly high level, a method that had "on occasions resulted in a certain lack of enterprise among the rank and file", the Germans on the other hand had always made a clear distinction between the "Storm Troops" who led the way and the "dense solid mass" who consolidated the position after the Storm Troops had won it. These "young Nazi hot-heads who filled the armoured divisions" had suffered very heavy losses, but had been responsible for a shattering series of German victories. The War Cabinet invited the Secretary of State for War to take a leaf out of the Germans' book by introducing a Storm Troop element into the Army which, together with the rapid replacement of "all leaders who should prove themselves lacking in drive and initiative", would help to improve training and "instil an offensive spirit into the Army as a whole". 32. Winston Churchill immediately took up the idea and minuted it the next day to General Ismay, with his customary verve:

31. CAB 65/7 WM(40)170th:9, 17 June 1940.

32. *ibid.*

"What are the ideas of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, about Storm Troops? We have always set our face against this idea, but the Germans certainly gained in the last War by adopting it, and this time it has been a leading cause of their victory. There ought to be at least 20,000 Storm Troops or 'Leopards' drawn from existing Units, ready to spring at the throat of any small landings or descents. These officers and men should be armed with the latest equipment, Tommy guns, grenades, etc., and should be given great facilities in motorcycles and armoured cars." 33.

At the Defence Committee meeting on 19th June, Churchill closely questioned General Ironside as to whether the idea of Storm Troops had been accepted by the Army and, if so, what progress had been made. The C.-in-C. replied that he was proceeding on the principle that there should be a large number of small units in the nature of Storm Troops, such as Tank Hunting Platoons in each battalion, the five Independent Companies that had returned from Norway, and "Special Irregular Units". However, he declared himself opposed to turning any particular division into a division of Storm Troops, and pointed out that while steps were being taken to inculcate throughout the Army the offensive spirit which was so important, "it should be remembered that effective counter-attacks could not be carried out without the requisite weapons". 34. After the meeting, General Ironside good-humouredly commented, "Winston in good form and gingering people up. His energy is unabated." 35.

The main limiting factor to the effectiveness of the mobile columns in late June, though, whether or not they included Storm Troops, was simply the problem of equipping them. The independent brigades, such as the 1st Armoured Reconnaissance Brigade and the three Motor Machine Gun Brigades, were not yet fully mobile and were still receiving their improvised "Ironside" armoured cars. They had virtually no anti-tank capacity. The small mobile reserve formed by the Carrier Platoon in every infantry battalion still largely lacked its Bren Carriers. The divisions on or near the coast, which had been reorganised on a basis of "mobile brigade groups of all arms", still did not have enough transport for the conveyance of two of their three brigades, and many could only move a single brigade at any one time. Most of the troops in these divisions were stretched along the coast-line, manning the static defences or working on their construction. Motor

33. Churchill, W. S.: Vol. II, Their Finest Hour, p. 147. Cassell, London, 1949.

34. CAB 69/1 DO(40)17th:1, 19 June 1940.

35. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 19 June 1940, op. cit.

Coach Companies were being organised as fast as drivers could be made available, but often civilian drivers could not be taken as many of them were over the age of 41 and were, therefore, immune from conscription, as the law stood. Many divisional Field Artillery regiments, while mobile, had at most only 10 field guns each, instead of their proper establishment of 24, and few of these were the modern 25 pdrs., while the shortage of anti-tank guns was as serious as ever.³⁶ It was to be a while yet before this state of affairs saw any significant improvement and, in the meantime, General Ironside had little choice but to rely primarily on static defence.

* * *

A further problem for General Ironside was that still posed by the large civilian population living in the coastal areas which were most liable to enemy attack, a population that was likely to dissolve into a hoard of panic-stricken refugees that would stream inland and severely congest the roads if the enemy landed, unless their numbers were severely reduced. Already, on 25th May, the Defence Committee had agreed to initiate the voluntary evacuation of children, pregnant women and invalids or old people from all major East Coast towns, with priority given to fifteen and then, with the later addition of Sheringham, Cromer, Sandgate and Hythe, to nineteen towns between Sheringham and Hythe. The remainder of the population was strictly instructed to "stay put" in the event of an invasion. However, the Committee had flinched from ordering an immediate full-scale evacuation from these towns and instead had contented itself with a scheme for the evacuation of 60% of the population of any particular coastal area, only if an emergency arose.³⁷ General Sir Hugh Elles, Chief of the Civil Defence Operational Staff, told the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 14th June that the 60% evacuation scheme "would be on a semi-compulsory basis, in that all evacuees would be told that it was their national duty to move out", but G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 3, issued only the next day, stated that this scheme "is likely to be ineffective, as it is voluntary".³⁸ A further difficulty was the timing of this 60% evacuation. Too early would cause unnecessary hardship to the evacuees and an unjustifiable burden on the reception areas; too late, and the scheme would fail, possibly with

36. CAB 69/1 DO(40)17th:1, 19 June 1940.

37. CAB 69/1 DO(40)8th:1, and Annexe, 25 May 1940.

38. CAB 79/5 COS(40)181st:3, 14 June 1940; and WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940, Appendix F: op. cit., 15 June 1940.

disastrous results. The scheme had been prepared on the basis of its being put into operation at 12 to 24 hours' notice, and being completed within 48 hours from the departure of the first train.³⁹ This, however, meant that perhaps three days' notice was necessary before the invasion materialised, if the scheme were to be of any real value. On 24th June, the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee warned the Chiefs of Staff that:

"Whilst we shall no doubt receive beforehand indications that seaborne invasion is impending, we cannot guarantee being able to give three days' warning.... Even if three days' notice of a seaborne invasion were possible, preliminary air attacks on rail or road communications would so dislocate traffic that the evacuation of the civil population of coastal towns might be impossible or at least chaotic. Evacuation under such conditions would seriously interfere with military movement."

Moreover, the J.I.C., as yet lacking the effective aid of 'Ultra' or the benefits of long-range air reconnaissance, could guarantee no warning at all in the case of seaborne raids or after the Germans had regrouped their air force for a large-scale air attack on the U.K., an event which might be a preliminary to an invasion at any time thereafter.⁴⁰

Yet another difficulty, concerning the evacuation of the civilian population from coastal areas, was that of the rapidly widening extent of coastline which was considered to be vulnerable to attack. As early as 6th June, the J.I.C. had stated that:

"The most favourable area for seaborne invasion stretches at present from The Wash to Newhaven. It will extend to the westward according to the progress of a German advance in Northern France." ⁴¹

Nevertheless, only the towns between Great Yarmouth and Hythe were earmarked for even partial evacuation at this time. On 18th June, the J.I.C. considered that, due to the damage at Belgian and French ports and the hazards negotiating the Straits of Dover, any enemy expedition from Northern France would "for the time being be limited to one of small vessels, including probably tank-carrying pontoons". Because of its slow speed and

39. CAB 79/5 COS(40)181st:3, 14 June 1940.

40. CAB 80/13 COS(40)487(JIC); also JIC(40)138: Coastal Evacuation: Notice to Home Defence Executive, Report by J.I.C., 24 June 1940.

41. CAB 80/12 COS(40)432(JIC); also JIC(40)101: Summary of the Likely Forms and Scales of Attack that Germany could bring to bear on the British Isles in the Near Future, Report by J.I.C., 8 June 1940.

vulnerability to attack by the Royal Navy, such a German expedition would be most likely to take the shortest sea crossing to England so that it could travel entirely in darkness. The area most likely for an enemy landing, therefore, would include, besides the most exposed part of the Kent promontory, the coastline from Hythe to Beachy Head in Sussex, and here "the length of warning probable will be too short to allow of an orderly evacuation taking place". They considered that "partial evacuation should now be carried out in this area". Given adequate air support, of which there was expected to be no shortage, a German expedition of this nature might shortly be able to land as far along the coast as Chichester Harbour, and then:

"When the Germans occupy ports west of Havre (including Cherbourg, which is 80 miles from the English coast), an expedition in craft of large tonnage against ports as far west as Lyme Regis might be attempted...." 42.

The very next day, the Chiefs of Staff were to add that,

".... the area bordering the East, South East and South Coast from Tyneside to Portland (inclusive) should be declared a defended area." 43.

This last suggestion was rejected by Sir John Anderson, the Secretary of State for Home Affairs and Minister for Home Security, at a War Cabinet meeting on 21st June, on the grounds that there was insufficient staff available to control all civilian movement in such an area and because he was unwilling to extend the already quite considerable defended area "without further experience of the steps already taken". Aliens had been removed from the whole of this coastal strip. 44. Even so, out of these statements, both by the Chiefs of Staff and by the J.I.C., there arose the question of the desirability of thinning the population in the coastal areas, firstly from Hythe (exclusively) to Newhaven, and secondly, and much less conveniently because of the large numbers of people involved, from Newhaven (exclusively) to Portland or Lyme Regis or perhaps even further afield.

42. CAB 80/13 COS(40)473(JIC); also JIC(40)125: Evacuation from South Coast Towns, Report by JIC, 18 June 1940.

43. CAB 66/8 WP(40)213; also COS(40)471: Urgent Measures to Meet Attack, Report by COS, 19 June 1940.

44. CAB 65/7 WM(40)174th:13, 21 June 1940.

The question of the evacuation of the population from vulnerable coastal areas was also to lead to a continuing conflict between the differing points of view of the military and the civil authorities. The greater the numbers of civilians in coastal areas liable to attack, the more the military authorities had cause for concern, whereas conversely, the more of these civilians that were evacuated, the greater would be the burden on the civil authorities, especially in matters of reception areas and accommodation for the evacuees. On 25th June, the War Cabinet had a long discussion on the evacuation question. The Chief of the Air Staff put forward the Chiefs of Staff Committees' view that they could not undertake to give three days' notice of enemy invasion and that "as it was impossible to predict when invasion was likely to be attempted evacuation should take place as soon as possible". General Ironside, also present at this meeting, confirmed that it would be desirable, from the military point of view, to carry out evacuation forthwith. Sir John Anderson said that active steps were being taken to define the classes of people who were to leave, but in some towns the population earmarked for evacuation might be as high as 90%, not 60% as previously envisaged, since it now included all but essential personnel. Departments had even been insisting that evacuation should cover the removal of workers engaged on war production. Moreover, whereas the present scheme covering the East Coast towns had been chosen "because this was the area most likely to be attacked by an enemy seeking to capture London", the burden of the civil authorities might soon be compounded, since:

"If there was any idea of extending the scheme to the more populous cities and towns on the South Coast such as Brighton and Hove, the difficulties of organising an evacuation would be immensely increased by the shortage of billets in reception areas."

The War Cabinet nevertheless approved, in principle, that the evacuation of 'useless mouths' from the 19 East Coast towns should start on 1st July or "as soon thereafter as possible" and the Home Secretary was invited to deliver his full report to the War Cabinet in three days' time. 45.

At the War Cabinet meeting on 27th June, however, Sir John Anderson produced a long list of objections to the scheme:

45. CAB 65/7 WM(40)181st:3, 25 June 1940.

"The complete scheme would involve the evacuation of 250,000 to 300,000 persons, and would entail compulsory billeting on a scale never before contemplated. So heavy a burden could be justified in the face of an obvious military necessity, but not as a purely precautionary measure invasion would probably not affect the whole coastline, but only two or three points. It would therefore be unreasonable to denude the whole coast unless military considerations made this imperative."

The preparation of plans for compulsory evacuation had, in fact, produced a large-scale voluntary evacuation, which had already reached 40% in the South East towns and 25% in East Anglia, and Anderson felt that this could be increased further. In the face of these powerful arguments, the Chiefs of Staff and General Ironside were more conciliatory, saying that while, from the military point of view, complete evacuation of this coastal strip "would undoubtedly help", it was however "not essential". They added that:

"Arrangements had been made to allot roads for the use of refugees, and most of the remaining population could be moved if and when necessary by 'tactical trains'. By a further tightening up of these and similar arrangements, it should be possible to meet the situation without compulsory evacuation, provided that voluntary evacuation was stimulated."

The War Cabinet, therefore, concluded that the plan for the compulsory evacuation of all but essential personnel from the 19 coastal towns between Sheringham and Hythe should be held in readiness, so that it could be implemented at short notice if it became necessary, but that "it should not be put into operation for the present". They decided that a scheme on this scale should only be carried out "as a military necessity, in the face of invasion or imminent invasion" and, in the meantime, the Minister of Home Security was to encourage voluntary evacuation from these towns "up to the level of say 60% of the population". 46.

Despite their conciliatory attitude on 27th June, the Chiefs of Staff were to make one further attempt at persuading the War Cabinet to begin the compulsory evacuation of the nineteen East Coast towns straightaway. General Sir Hugh Elles reported to a meeting of the Vice-Chiefs of Staff on 1st July that the plans for the compulsory evacuation of these towns were now ready to be put into immediate effect as soon as the War Cabinet made up its mind to implement them. Lieutenant General R. H. Haining, Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who was chairing the meeting, added that:

46. CAB 65/7 WM(40)184th:1, 27 June 1940.

".... in the light of the more recent reports received from various sources, large-scale operations (either invasion and/or air attack) against this country must be considered as likely to take place any day now it was his view, and that of the C.-in-C., Home Forces, that the compulsory evacuation of East Coast towns should begin at once."

The Vice-Chiefs, therefore, decided to recommend to the War Cabinet that it should review its recent decision on this matter. The Vice-Chiefs also decided that, independently of this, the civil population from Hythe (exclusively) to Newhaven "should now be thinned out to the greatest practicable extent" in view of the German threat from Western France, though it was not thought necessary yet to thin out the heavily populated West Sussex towns because the presence of refugees would be less of an embarrassment to the military in the more open countryside of the South Downs. Up to now, the only evacuation that had taken place from South Coast towns west of Hythe had, except for some thinning out of school-children in the Portsmouth area, been entirely voluntary and there were still present in these towns many schoolchildren who had been evacuated there from "dangerous areas" elsewhere. Despite this extension, it was the East Coast scheme that was to receive priority in the event of conflicting claims for transport and billeting accommodation. 47.

On 3rd July, therefore, the War Cabinet was presented with a strongly worded report by the Chiefs of Staff, which urged them to review their previous conclusion of 27th June that compulsory evacuation should not yet be carried out. Repeating that they were unable to give an assurance that Britain would receive three days' notice of attack, they warned:

"There are indications that major operations against this Country either by invasion and/or heavy air attack may commence any day from now onwards.

We cannot be certain that we shall receive any more definite information than is in our possession at present as to the day and hour that the operations will commence. Moon and tide conditions and various reports from foreign countries, of varying reliability, indicate that between the 3rd and 10th July may be the critical days....

The Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, considers that from the military point of view compulsory evacuation should take place now." 48.

47. CAB 79/5 COS(40)203rd:2, 1 July 1940.

48. CAB 66/9 WP(40)240; also COS(40)514: Evacuation of Civil Population from East, South-East and South Coast Towns, Report by C.O.S., 3 July 1940.

At the War Cabinet meeting that day, both Air Chief Marshal Newall and General Dill argued that there were many signs of an invasion in the near future that "could not be ignored" and emphasized the danger of delaying the evacuation until it was too late. However, in spite of the efforts of the Chiefs of Staff to persuade them to change their minds, the War Cabinet remained unconvinced, Sir John Anderson especially pointing out that the problems involved in compulsory evacuation for the nineteen East Coast towns were too great. Listing again the difficulties involved in compulsory billeting massive numbers of people and the fact that invasion was only likely to affect certain points on the coastline, he added that:

"Public opinion was already somewhat jumpy, and would become more so if this scheme was carried out. Further people on other parts of the coast would ask why they also were not evacuated."

The War Cabinet thus decided again not to initiate compulsory evacuation, but instead to continue to place their faith in voluntary evacuation, which had actually reached 50% in the South East coastal towns. People who remained in an area affected by operations, therefore, would simply have to stay put. 49.

In reality, those of the civilian population who did stay put would risk severe casualties not only by enemy bombing and shelling, but also by that of the British defenders, and, unless voluntary evacuation were to reduce considerably the population of the vulnerable coastal towns, many thousands would inevitably have to take to the roads if the enemy landed, especially if their homes were destroyed. Nevertheless, the policy of voluntary evacuation only was to continue during the coming months and, in fact, was to prove very successful. Just a couple of weeks later, on 18th July, the Chiefs of Staff Committee heard that, by various means, including moving original evacuees elsewhere, the state-aided evacuation of local children, by preparing evacuation schemes and making them known locally, by urging the local inhabitants who could go to do so, and by making certain arrangements to assist them, such as a moratorium for rents or a billeting allowance, the population of the East Anglian coastal towns had been reduced by 54% from 280,000 to 129,000, and that of the Kentish coastal towns by 61% from 207,000 to only 80,000. Thus, these reductions, achieved mainly by voluntary means, already approximated to the 60% figure it was

49. CAB 65/8 WM(40)192nd:14, 3 July 1940.

originally hoped to attain by a compulsory scheme, and the numbers evacuated were to continue to increase throughout the summer. The Chiefs of Staff, suitably impressed, now authorised that similar measures should be applied to the South Coast towns as far as Newhaven. New Romney, Lydd, Rye, Hastings, Bexhill, Eastbourne, Seaford and Newhaven itself were, therefore, added to the list with a recommendation that voluntary evacuation should take place on the same scale as from the nineteen East and South East Coast towns. Like the Chiefs of Staff, General Ironside had by now also accepted that complete evacuation was impracticable and he declared himself "fully in favour" of continuing to thin out the coastal population by these means.⁵⁰ Unimpeded by the presence of large numbers of civilians, the troops on or near the most vulnerable coastlines would henceforth be much freer to concentrate their attention on the primary task of repelling the invaders.

* * *

In the meantime, the greatest problem of all for General Ironside remained simply the crucial question of whether there were sufficient time for Home Forces to complete its preparations and build up its strength enough to be able to resist successfully the German onslaught when it came, as it was believed it might do any day. The greatest fear of man is that of the unknown, of what might happen. What Churchill called "the veil of the unknown" was as thick and as impenetrable as ever. General Ironside confided, on 22nd June:

"The tactical problem is such a difficult one with no idea where the enemy may come from, either from the sea or the air. A clever enemy may be able to join up the two efforts very quickly. We want so much time to get our preparations ready, and time is the one thing the Germans are not likely to give us. The complete blank wall of Intelligence is still in front of us, and we can get no information about the preparations being made the other side."

He added, on 29th June:

"Every day gets our preparations better and our troops better armed. If the Germans intend to attack - and everything seems to point to the fact that they will - it is a race between their preparations and ours. They are much better prepared than we are, and we are improvising all the time."

50. CAB 79/5 COS(40)227th:1, 18 July 1940.

We have the Navy and the Air Force, neither of which can guarantee us against a landing, though they can limit the alimentionation of such landings as have taken place.

With luck they may not surprise us.

We are forced to disperse. They can concentrate on any point or points they have chosen. All the main points are therefore in the Germans' favour, so long as they can be assured of good weather...." 51.

The latter, in fact, was being as contrary as ever. Britain was having one of its finest summers for years.

General Ironside was also not being helped by a controversial debate that sprang up at the highest levels towards the end of June, as to the nature and effectiveness of his plans for the land defence of the Nation. On 25th June, General Ironside exposed his completed plans to the Chiefs of Staff Committee. All the carefully thought out elements of the defence were embodied in the general scheme and each had its vitally important part to play. The main points of his plan were, firstly, an extended "crust" along the probable invasion beaches. This was to be held as an "outpost line" and was designed to beat off minor enterprises, to keep a watch for and to report immediately German attempts at invasion, and to break up, delay and canalize all penetrations. The troops manning this line were to fight where they stood, so as to gain time for support by mobile reserves who would put in immediate local counterattacks. They would also have the support of most of the available field guns which were sited near the coast to cover the most likely landing places. Secondly, there would be blocks manned by the L.D.V. at all defiles and nodal points, to stop or delay German armoured columns that had broken through, and to harry any penetration. This "local defence" would make full use of concrete and other types of roadblock to stop the movements of enemy tanks, while the L.D.V. had Molotov cocktails and other devices with which to attempt to destroy them. Thirdly, in support of both the "crust" and these local defences, there would be small local mobile reserves, including mobile columns with A.F.V.'s such as the "Ironsides". These would deal with any minor breakthrough and would also have the additional task of dealing with paratroop landings. Under Corps and Command control there would be larger mobile reserve formations with a similar counter-attacking role. Fourthly, there

51. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 22 & 29 June 1940, op. cit.

was to be a strong major defence line, constructed to stop any major breakthrough from reaching London or the industrial Midlands. (See Map 7.) This was to consist of a "G.H.Q. stopline" of natural or artificial anti-tank obstacles, covered by fire from over 2,500 blockhouses. This line would primarily be held by the L.D.V.. It was to extend, in East Anglia, from The Wash at King's Lynn via Cambridge and Chelmsford to the River Thames at Canvey Island, making use of the line of the Rivers Great Ouse, Cam and Upper Chelmer; and, in the South East and South, it was to continue from the River Thames east of Gravesend via Rochester, Maidstone, Tonbridge and Edenbridge on the Rivers Medway and Eden, along the southern edge of the North Downs to cover Reigate, Guildford and Aldershot, and from there via the River Blackwater to join the Kennet and Avon Canal just west of Reading. The line was then to follow this canal via Newbury, Hungerford and Devizes until its junction with the River Avon at Bath, and finally to follow the River Avon to the Bristol Channel, so as to cover the important City of Bristol. It was also planned to continue the G.H.Q. Line from The Wash at Boston, via the Rivers Witham and Trent to the Humber, and thence via the Vale of York to finish at Middlesbrough. There were also to be additional shorter Corps and Divisional lines of "stops" forward between the main G.H.Q. Line and the coast. Five of these were apparently planned for East Anglia, so as to confine, break up and delay an enemy advance from the vulnerable beaches about Lowestoft and Harwich, either towards the Midlands or across the open uplands north of London; and three were to be situated in Kent, Sussex and Surrey to bar the approaches to London from the South East. Fifthly and lastly, there was the G.H.Q. Reserve, consisting at first of one armoured and the equivalent of three infantry divisions with most of the few available towed anti-tank guns, centrally placed to the rear of the G.H.Q. Line as the major counter-attacking force. ⁵².

These dispositions, therefore, were meant to ensure defence in great depth, so as to prevent enemy tank columns running riot and to stop the invaders reaching the capital or the industrial towns of the Midlands, both of which were essential to the continuation of the war, and also, as far as resources permitted, to provide troops for counterattack. With 500 miles of beaches on the South and East Coasts suitable for the landing of A.F.V.'s, of which a third were in areas where the full might of the German

52. CAB 79/5 COS(40)193rd:2, 25 June 1940; Macleod, R. and Kelly, D. (eds.): The Ironside Diaries, 1937-1940, pp. 371-372, Constable, London, 1962; and Collier, Basil: History of the Second World War: The Defence of the United Kingdom, pp. 129-130, H.M.S.O., London, 1957.

air force could be employed, and with his troops suffering from a chronic lack of equipment, mobility and training, especially in the offensive, with virtually no armoured formations, and with the recent experience in France of the wholehearted offensive tactics which the Germans were likely to employ, added to the threat of enemy airborne troops who might be landed a long way inland, General Ironside was forced to conclude that the only answer lay in combining his few mobile or armoured units with this extensive scheme of static preparations deployed over a wide area. Only as more equipment and transport became available, and as training improved, could a more offensive form of defence become possible and be implemented. ⁵³.

General Ironside's plans, however, were destined to cause severe alarm especially on the vital question of where the main battle should be fought if the Germans tried to invade. At the morning meeting on the 25th June, the three Chiefs of Staff had seemed satisfied with General Ironside's explanation. However, at 3.30 p.m. the very next day, the Vice-Chiefs of Staff, who had presumably scrutinised the plans in more detail but who had not been present at the Chiefs of Staff's meeting, met to discuss various matters of Home Defence. Lord Hankey, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, had written a letter to be circulated to the Committee on the role of the Army, Navy and Air Force in Home Defence, and in this he had summarised the Army's role as being "to attack the enemy as violently as possible from the moment when he came within range of whatever weapons are available on the spot". ⁵⁴. Arising out of discussion on this item, Lieutenant General R. H. Haining, the Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff, then drew attention to the minutes of the Chief of Staff's meeting the previous day, and especially to the fact that General Ironside had declared his intention of holding the coast as a "crust" or "outpost line" and of holding the G.H.Q. mobile Reserves "in rear" of the main defence line, which was to run "down the East centre of England". Both Lieutenant General Haining and his two colleagues, Air Marshal Sir Richard Pierse, the Vice-Chief of the Air Staff, and Vice-Admiral Thomas Phillips, the Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff, then went on to express "the greatest concern at these dispositions", since, as they saw it,

53. Collier, Basil: op. cit., pp. 129-130.

54. CAB 80/13 COS(40)490: Home Defence, Letter by Lord Hankey to the C.O.S. Committee, 25 June 1940.

".... it appeared that the main resistance might only be offered after the enemy had overrun nearly half the country, and obtained possession of aerodromes and other vital facilities."

The Vice-Chiefs echoed Lord Hankey's opinion that "the only policy was to resist the enemy with the utmost resolution from the moment he set foot on the shore". They continued:

"Once he established himself firmly on land, experience had shown that the German was extremely difficult to dislodge. The enemy would use their best troops for the initial landing, and we should have to face the fact that their training and equipment would be superior to that of our own troops. For this reason we should have to dispute every inch of the ground at the landing places themselves. It had always been recognized that the most hazardous part of an opposed landing was in the disembarkation on the beaches."

They also criticized the fact that General Ironside's plan had made very little mention of the defence of the South Coast "which was now quite as liable to attack as the East and South East Coasts". The Vice-Chiefs concluded that, in their view, "the plan was completely unsound and needed drastic and immediate revision". Agreeing to place their views before the Chiefs of Staff "forthwith" and to request the latter to discuss this question with them present "as a matter of urgency", the Vice-Chiefs added:

"It was, of course, impossible to be strong everywhere along the coast. Nevertheless, the idea of holding the 'crust' with outposts and contemplating the main line of resistance after half the Country had been overrun, seemed nothing short of suicidal." 55.

Learning of this alarming reaction from the Vice-Chiefs, General Dill immediately hurried down to G.H.Q., Home Forces, at Kneller Hall, Twickenham, to see General Ironside and discuss with him his Operational Instructions for the Defence of the Country. General Ironside maintained that his scheme of coastal defence was the best that could be devised, taking into account his severely limited resources. He continued to insist that he would have liked nothing better than the opportunity to frame a more offensive strategy, if only he had the means to do so.

The Chiefs of Staff and the Vice-Chiefs met at 9.45 p.m. that day specifically to discuss General Ironside's plans. The Vice-Chief of the Air Staff explained the worries of the Vice-Chiefs. The Chiefs of Staff,

however, unlike the Vice-Chiefs, had actually been present at the explanation given by Sir Edmund Ironside on the previous day. Air Chief Marshal Sir Cyril Newall, chairing the meeting, said that he had received "rather a different impression" from the explanation. He had understood that,

".... the coast was to be defended by positions established at the most likely landing places and sufficiently strong to check and delay landings. Behind this was a mass of manoeuvre which would be used to check penetration and the anti-tank obstacle referred to as running down the centre of England would only be used in the last resort."

General Dill, fresh from his talk with General Ironside that afternoon, also supported the Commander-in-Chief. Quoting relevant extracts from the G.H.Q. Operational Instructions, he argued that General Ironside's original explanation had perhaps been badly worded:

"It was clear from the Instructions that defences had been prepared and would be manned along stretches of the coast where landings by tanks were considered possible. At other places arrangements had been made to patrol the beaches and repulse landings, if discovered, by the use of local reserves. The beach defences, however, were referred to as 'outposts', giving the impression that they might at some time be withdrawn and might not be expected to resist to the bitter end. In order that there should be no misconception on this point, it would be better to refer to them as foremost defended localities which would then in no case be abandoned."

During the discussion, the view was expressed that the Commander-in-Chief intended that the battle should be fought on the seashore and that this intention was fully appreciated by the troops manning the coastal defences. Major General Hastings Ismay, who had accompanied the Prime Minister that day on a visit to the defences in East Anglia, said that "the troops and Commanders that they had visited undoubtedly intended to fight on the seashore and had no thought of withdrawal", while Air Chief Marshal Newall, who had also seen General Ironside earlier in the day to co-ordinate the use of the R.A.F.'s bombers in the event of invasion, warned that "it was particularly important from the Air Force point of view that the battle should take place on the seashore", since "there would be no difficulty then in distinguishing between friend and foe and little danger of bombing our own people". All in all, however, the Committee agreed that, in both General Ironside's explanation on the previous day and in "certain paragraphs" of his Operational Instructions, "too much emphasis had been placed on the line of anti-tank obstacles down the centre of England and that the object of the beach defences had not been clearly expressed." 56.

Worry, too, was expressed at the meeting as to the positioning and, indeed, the adequacy of General Ironside's reserves. Troops fighting from static defences were only able to obstruct, delay and harass the enemy, and could not destroy him by themselves. Ultimately, the success of the battle must depend upon the rapidity with which both these troops and the small mobile reserves supporting the coastal defence could be reinforced by formations from the main reserve, which was located behind the G.H.Q. anti-tank line, so as to be able to deliver a killing blow. It was pointed out, however, that:

"The line of anti-tank obstacles was in places a long way from the coast and there seemed a great danger that reserves might arrive after the enemy had consolidated any success, particularly if airborne troops were landed between the coast and the reserves with the object of delaying the advance of the latter."

Not only this, but the local reserves themselves were felt to be insufficient. Major General Ismay had found during his visit to East Anglia that day that the local divisional commanders were "worried by the absence of local reserves, as they had been obliged to use most of their troops in the forward localities. The main reserves were some distance back and would not arrive within twelve hours even under favourable conditions." He, himself, thought that "one or two extra divisions" could be moved forward, so as to reduce the length of the coastline held per division and increase the size of the local reserves, though the Committee preferred the view that now that the coastal defences were more advanced, a proportion of the troops should spend their time training "in movement and counter-attack", rather than in constructing and manning the defences. The Chief of the Air Staff added that "the system of warning and inter-communication, particularly with co-operating Air Forces, should be practised". The Committee as a whole agreed that a memorandum covering their views on all these points should be prepared for General Ironside's consideration. 57.

Their memorandum, the details of which were approved by the Chiefs of Staff on the following morning, 27th June, stated that General Ironside's plan of defence "appears to us to be generally sound". All, however, was far from well. Though the Chiefs of Staff were reluctant to believe that General Ironside intended anything other than putting the main emphasis on

the coastal battle, they were understandably anxious that any misinterpretations of the plan should be dispelled immediately and that General Ironside should give the necessary assurances as soon as possible, otherwise doubt and confusion would prevail. The Chiefs of Staff, therefore, went on to summarize the criticisms levelled against the plan:

".... We are not entirely satisfied that sufficient emphasis has been laid upon the paramount necessity of resisting the enemy by all the means in our power, during that vital phase in the operations where he will be most vulnerable, i.e. during the process of disembarkation on the beaches. We have formed the impression that the term 'crust' or 'outpost', when applied to the defence of our shores, is liable to misconception and danger. A defence which is termed a 'crust' implies that it is expected to be broken, while an 'outpost' is indicative of thinly held posts from which retirement is permissible under pressure.

We fully appreciate that it will be impossible in the time available, and with the forces at the Commander-in-Chief's disposal, to make impregnable the whole coastline on which a landing might be attempted, especially as airborne landings on a considerable scale must also be guarded against. Nevertheless, we feel that the balance of our defence, as the plan has been explained to us, may lean too far on the side of a thinly held 'crust' on the coast with insufficient mobile reserves in the immediate vicinity of the points at which penetrations might occur."

They continued:

"We are not clear as to the location of reserves. While the position of London and the need for space for deployment in any required direction necessitates the retention some way inland of the main reserves, yet the need for immediate counter-attack against any penetrations is paramount, and troops so situated as the main reserves may take an unduly long time in coming into action.

Consequently, we are anxious for an assurance that, bearing in mind the total forces available, there is a sufficient proportion available as local reserves in close support of the troops on the coast to hold the invader until the main reserves can intervene.... We fully agree that, having regard to the limited forces available, our main reserves must not be concentrated too close to the coast. Nevertheless, we are not entirely satisfied that the present location of the main reserves is sufficiently far forward to enable them effectively to counter a penetration of the forward defences." 58.

General Ironside, meanwhile, was becoming exasperated. On 26th June, he wrote:

58. CAB 79/5 COS(40)197th:4, 27 June 1940; and CAB 80/13 COS(40)495, also WP(40)236: Home Defence, Memorandum by the C.O.S., 27 June 1940.

"I am being bombarded with letters from people saying that this and that place is not defended, and that the quality of the troops is bad here and there. I know that it is, and can do nothing to alter it. Our equipment is ludicrously deficient and the War Office knows it. Only about 30% of our complement of guns."

On the 27th, he inspected defences on the South East Coast from Folkestone to Rye in Lieutenant General A. F. N. Thorne's XII Corps area:

"Work is going on apace, but we are woefully short on the ground. We cannot put all the men into the 'crust' of defence on the beaches. We may be attacked at so many points and must have a reserve that can be moved about to meet both the sea landings and the air landings. I think there is no doubt that the Germans might effect a landing at any point and with little warning. Our defences are advancing, but terribly slowly in view of the imminence of the attack and the resources available to the Germans. Every portion of the coast at which I look seems weaker than the other and the troops less trained and more unhandy...."

The next morning he continued his inspection along the coast to Brighton, where Major General Bernard Montgomery's 3rd Regular Division had recently taken up position. Here he found work was "progressing well". He confided to his diary that day, however:

"They are beginning to worry at the War Office, and both I and Paget are being continually sent for to see people. Paget to see the P.M. and I to see the Secretary of State and the Chiefs of Staff. I also find that the paper which is being poured out by the War Office is terrific. It is hampering efficiency in every way. You cannot make war with a pen."

Everybody is getting nervous and is beginning to scent the invasion coming. Just what Hitler wants to make us believe. Feint attacks or attacks which may be turned into main attacks if they are at all successful. I had an example today of the 3rd Division being taken into War Office reserve, put back to me again, and sent back to the War Office. Shilly-shallying and doubt. The politicians will not leave the soldiers alone." 59.

The Prime Minister, himself, now added further confusion to the existing scheme. That day, 28th June, he drew up a memorandum in which he agreed with the War Office view that the East Coast was still the area which was most vulnerable to a German invasion attempt. "The South Coast," he declared, "is less immediately dangerous." He went on, however, to oppose the Chiefs of Staff's view that the main emphasis should be placed on the defence of the coastline:

59. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 26 & 28 June 1940, op. cit.

"No one can tell, should the Navy fail, on what part of the East Coast the impact will fall. Perhaps there will be several lodgements. Once these are made, all troops employed on other parts of the coastal crust will be as useless as those on the Maginot Line. Although fighting on the beaches is favourable to the defence, this advantage cannot be purchased by trying to guard all the beaches.... Every effort must be made to man coast defences with sedentary troops, well sprinkled with experienced late-war officers."

Nevertheless, he was in agreement with the Chiefs of Staff as to the importance of the mobile reserves and especially the immediate local reserves which he had already dubbed as the "Leopards". Winston Churchill's memorandum continued:

"The safety of the Country depends on having a large number (now only nine, but should soon be fifteen) of 'Leopard' brigade groups which can be directed swiftly, i.e. within four hours, to the point of lodgement. The difficulties of landing on beaches are serious, even when the invader has reached them, but the difficulties of nourishing a lodgement when exposed to heavy attack by land, air and sea are far greater. All, therefore, depends on the rapid, resolute engagement of any landed forces which may slip through the sea-control. This should not be beyond our means, provided the field troops are not consumed in beach defences, and are kept in a high condition of mobility, crouched and ready to spring."

Adding that "four or five good divisions" with artillery should also be held in general reserve, in case of "the unhappy event of the enemy capturing a port", the Prime Minister concluded:

"In general, I find myself in agreement with the Commander-in-Chief's plan, but all possible field-troops must be saved from the beaches and gathered into the 'Leopard' brigades and other immediate mobile supports. The battle will be won or lost not on the beaches, but by the mobile brigades and the main reserves." 60.

Churchill's memorandum contrasted strangely with his famous, "We shall fight on the beaches", speech that he had delivered so recently. It also contrasted with the views of another politician, Lord Hankey, who, not to be outdone, now produced a revised version of his own earlier memorandum to the Chiefs of Staff which had been to some extent responsible for initiating this debate over General Ironside's plans. In his revised memorandum of 28th June, summarizing the duties of the various Services in repelling invasion, he declared:

60. CAB 80/13 COS(40)498; also WP(40)236: Note by the Prime Minister to the C.O.S. Committee: Home Defence, 28 June 1940.

"The general policy of Home Defence is to attack the enemy so far as possible from the moment when his preparations are discovered; during the voyage by sea or air, if he succeeds in starting; in the act of landing (which must be prevented if possible); and after landing until the forces are completely destroyed."

With this, the Prime Minister would have agreed. Lord Hankey, however, went on to add that:

"The beaches and ports are the main line of defence of this Country and the enemy must be repulsed there by all possible means." ⁶¹.

General Ironside, in the meantime, had been summoned to attend a meeting with the Chiefs of Staff. This meeting took place at 11.30 a.m. on 29th June, and General Ironside was immediately confronted with both the Prime Minister's and Lord Hankey's memoranda of the previous day, as well as the Chiefs of Staff's own memorandum of the 27th June. Overworked, overburdened and aggravated by the extreme pressure, General Ironside once again explained his unenviable position. As regards the question of whether the main battle should be fought on the beaches or further inland, he insisted that it had been made "quite clear" in the G.H.Q. Operational Instructions that "there was to be no withdrawal from the beach defences and that the troops in them were to fight it out where they stood". He admitted, however, that not only were the troops manning the beach defences themselves already largely "sedentary" or "partially trained troops unfitted for mobile operations", but the divisions holding the beaches "had very few troops indeed disposed in depth as local reserves". Thus, both the beach defence and the local mobile reserves were very weak, which was the main reason for the extensive scheme of static "stoplines" far inland. This appalling situation existed purely out of necessity and was certainly not through choice; he would have liked nothing better than the opportunity to frame a more offensive strategy. The simple explanation, though, was as ever the chronic lack of training and equipment, especially among the divisions ranged along the coasts. The battalions holding the beach defences, General Ironside explained to the Chiefs of Staff,

".... were, of course, disposed in depth to some extent, but they had very wide fronts to cover. They would have their Bren Carriers as a small mobile force for immediate counter-attack, but the majority of the divisions in the line were only partially trained and had very little artillery."

61. CAB 80/13 COS(40)500; also WP(40)236: Home Defence, Note by Lord Hankey, 28 June 1940.

Formations in this condition were unsuitable for counter-attacks on a large scale and in these circumstances there would be little advantage in keeping larger local reserves for counter-attack."

Far from attempting to guard all the many miles of beaches, General Ironside also pointed out that the allocation of troops to beaches "had been very carefully considered in relation to the probability of landings upon them". Where landings were improbable for navigational reasons, troops were economised as much as possible, even though the beaches themselves might be good landing places. Nevertheless, despite the weakness of the troops manning them, the construction of the actual beach defences was progressing well. General Ironside went on to say that already,

".... anti-tank obstacles had been erected at all places where tanks were likely to land. These were being supplemented by wire entanglements as quickly as possible. The defensive position on the coast would be much more than a 'crust' within a very short time as these defences were completed and strengthened." 62.

In answer to the second major point raised by the Chiefs of Staff, that of the positioning of the main G.H.Q. and the Command reserves, General Ironside pointed out that, though these made up a "considerable proportion" of the total forces available, their location so far inland was so that they would be able "to deal not only with landings by sea, but also air landings, of which we were likely to get no warning at all". Indeed, the whole layout of the defence had to be directed to both these ends. He revealed that the G.H.Q. Reserves were now being divided into two main groups which, operating to the north and to the south of the barrier to movement posed by London and the River Thames, would be able to reach the threatened points "within a few hours", while reserves in the hands of lower formations could get to the coast "very much more quickly". General Ironside explained that, with even his main reserves insufficiently provided with tanks, anti-tank guns and artillery, with the danger of seaborne landings occurring at any point along a very long coastline from Norway, the Baltic, Holland, Belgium, France, or from Ireland if the Germans captured that, with the danger of airborne landings taking place literally anywhere, with the British anti-invasion preparations still very incomplete and with a total veil of secrecy still hanging over the preparations of the enemy, he had little choice but to place the G.H.Q. Reserves far inland in

62. CAB 79/5 COS(40)199th:1; also WP(40)236, 29 June 1940.

63. *ibid.*; and Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 29 June 1940, *op. cit.*

a central position. The Germans, he felt, would "probably make one main landing by air and perhaps up to three landings by sea" and would "exploit whichever of these proved to be the soft spot". He considered that he could only do so much with the forces at his disposal:

"If we had four armoured divisions in the United Kingdom, the whole problem of the defence of the country would be solved." 63.

The Chiefs of Staff agreed that the plan of defence as described by the Commander-in-Chief covered the requirements that they had drawn up in their memorandum, while Winston Churchill later wrote of the plans:

"They were of course scrutinised with anxious care by the experts, and I examined them myself with no little attention. On the whole they stood approved." 64.

General Ironside, however, recalled of this day:

"I spent an unsatisfactory day with the Chiefs of Staff. They are not clear in their minds as to what they want as to our defence. At one time they say that we must defeat the enemy on the beaches when he lands, and that we must hold a sufficient reserve. [At another time] that the teaching of the war is that we mustn't hold lines. The whole thing is very difficult and I have given them my views.... And so we have decided to hold the coast as a 'crust'. Work is proceeding fast on anti-tank obstacles at beaches, wire and pillboxes. The idea is to inflict all the losses we can, and to attack at once with our mobile forces at the beaches or at any point to which they have penetrated. For this we have what local reserves we have, and two [G.H.Q.] reserves each of a mobile division and an armoured division. We are also creating a local static defence of armed riflemen using blocks and pillboxes all over the country." 65.

* * *

The argument appeared on the face of it to be over. Nothing, however, was further from the truth. Even though the Chiefs of Staff now seemed satisfied, the debate in fact had the effect of sowing the seeds of uncertainty and doubt about General Ironside's plans and dispositions, both among the War Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff and, much more seriously as regards the successful defence of the Country, among certain of the higher-placed commanders in the field. Fostered by the tense and jumpy atmosphere caused

64. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., p. 155.

65. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 29 June 1940, op. cit.

by almost daily expectation of the German invasion, uneasiness and dissatisfaction were to grow steadily in many quarters into a serious lack of confidence in the abilities of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, himself.

Some field commanders were determined to plan their own tactics, regardless of the official directives from the War Office and G.H.Q., Home Forces. Chief among these was the newly appointed General Officer, Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Command, Lieutenant General Sir Alan Brooke, who had replaced the elderly Lieutenant General Sir Bertie Fisher on 26th June. On arrival at Southern Command H.Q. at Wilton, near Salisbury, he found that his immediate command essentially consisted of only a single Corps H.Q., that of V Corps, which comprised only two ill-equipped infantry divisions, the 4th (Regular) Division in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and the 50th (Northumbrian) Division in Dorset; although the 48th (South Midland) was ordered to the Severn area on 28th June from Western Command. (See Map 6.) With these three divisions, all of which had only recently recovered from their ordeal at Dunkirk, Lieutenant General Brooke was expected to defend a coastline stretching from the borders of Sussex round to Wales. Preparations to defend this extremely long coastline were virtually non-existent, except in the vital Isle of Wight and Solent area in Major General 'Rusty' Eastwood's 4th Division sector. Devon and Cornwall were practically bare of troops; while across the Channel the Germans were now firmly established in Western France. Everywhere there seemed a lack of drive and preparedness. General Brooke wrote on 26th June:

"The overall impression I had was that the Command had a long way to go to be put on a war footing and that a peace atmosphere was still prevailing."

Following a visit to the Dorset coast on 2nd July, he added:

"The more I see of the nakedness of our defences the more appalled I am! no arms, no transport and no equipment and yet there are masses of men in uniform, but they are mostly untrained: why, I cannot think, after ten months of war. The ghastly part of it is that I feel certain that we can only have a few more weeks before the Boche attacks." 66.

Though he immediately set to work to strengthen the coastal defences, Brooke was steadfastly opposed to the War Office view that these should form the main line of defence. He was equally opposed to the concept of

66. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 26 June & 2 July 1940.

extensive static stoplines placed far inland. Far more important, in his opinion, was the need to build up a strong reserve for mobile operations. He also believed, unlike the Chiefs of Staff and the Prime Minister, that the Germans' main thrust would come not across the North Sea against East Anglia and Kent, but across the English Channel against the South Coast, and he was therefore very anxious about the small number of troops under his command. An opportunity to put forward his views soon presented itself. Late on 29th June, he was invited to lunch at Chequers with the Prime Minister and Lieutenant General Sir Bernard Paget, General Ironside's Chief of Staff. Declining to disrupt his hectic activity in Southern Command, he successfully suggested that Paget should visit him at his Headquarters instead. Lieutenant General Brooke recalled, the next day:

"Had a long talk with him, telling him what I wanted for the defence of Southern Command, namely, another Corps H.Q., another division, some armoured units and a call on bomber squadrons. Some of these things I may get. At any rate, I rubbed into him the nakedness of this Command taken in relation to the new situation in Western France." 67.

The Germans began the occupation of the demilitarised Channel Islands on the very same day, thus increasing the threat still further. Two days later, on 2nd July, he followed up his discussion with the Chief of Staff by writing to General Ironside's G.H.Q.:

"I consider that the threat to the South West of England is as great, if not greater, than any of the northern portions of our East Coast. At the present time I understand that six divisions are allotted to the Northern Command, while only three to the Southern, and I submit that, in view of the increased threat that now exists to South West England, this is not sufficient."

G.H.Q. at first refused him troops, saying that his comparison omitted the vulnerability of London and the major industrial areas to attack from the East Coast compared with the difficulties of an advance from the South West, the fact that the Germans could not force the Straits of Dover with their large ships, and the limited range of German air cover. Unknown to both General Brooke and G.H.Q., the Germans had, in fact, only begun on that same day seriously to plan and prepare for an invasion, following their high command's first official order to this effect. Following a further

67. Bryant, Arthur: The Turn of the Tide, 1939-1943, pp. 189-190, Collins, London, 1957.

68. WO 166/57: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, Home Forces, Southern Command, 2 July 1940; and Bryant, Arthur: op. cit., pp. 189-190.

request, however, General Brooke was soon to receive many of the reinforcements he had asked for. Meanwhile, he threw himself into the work of inspecting beach defences from Bognor Regis to Plymouth, visiting formations, replacing unsuitable officers, attending conferences with his commanders, organising exercises, establishing a central mobile reserve on Salisbury Plain and generally "trying to instil a greater war atmosphere". 68.

Another very vocal critic of the official defence policy was Major-General Bernard Montgomery, who was at this time in a relatively junior position as Commander of the 3rd Regular Division in Eastern Command. This division had been moved to the West Sussex coastline up to and including Brighton, on 19th June, and found the same peaceful atmosphere and lack of urgency as existed then in Southern Command, especially among the large civilian population. The 3rd Division, Montgomery recalled:

".... descended like an avalanche on the inhabitants of that area; we dug in the gardens of the seaside villas, we sited machine-gun posts in the best places, and we generally set about our job in the way we were accustomed to do things in an emergency. The protests were tremendous. Mayors, County Councillors, private owners, came to see me and demanded that we should cease our work; I refused, and explained the urgency of the need and that we were preparing to defend the South Coast against the Germans.... It was not understood that the British Army had suffered a crushing defeat at Dunkirk and that our island home was now in grave danger. There was no sense of urgency."

The 3rd Division had been given the highest priority for re-equipment and had been about to sail for France when the French resistance ended. It was even now earmarked to be sent to Southern Ireland in an emergency. The division, however, was being spread along thirty miles of coast, instead of being held back concentrated in reserve, ready to move against any serious enemy lodgement. Moreover, the infantry of this division, though otherwise fully mobile, had not been permitted to retain their transport close at hand. Like Lieutenant General Brooke, Major-General Montgomery did not miss an opportunity to air his views. On 2nd July, his division received a visit from Winston Churchill. The two quickly saw eye to eye on the tactics of home defence. "The main thing which seemed curious to me," Montgomery told the Prime Minister,

".... was that my division was immobile. It was the only fully equipped division in England, the only division fit to fight any enemy anywhere. And here we were in a static role, ordered to dig in on the South Coast.

Some other troops should take on my task; my division should be given buses, and be held in mobile reserve with a counter-attacking role. Why was I left immobile? There were thousands of buses in England; let them give me some, and release me from this static role, so that I could practise a mobile counter-attack role."

Churchill thought that the idea was "the cat's whiskers" and, indeed, he minuted the very next day to the Secretary of State for War to this effect. Montgomery later recalled, with satisfaction, "I do not know what the War Office thought, but I got my buses." ⁶⁹.

The majority of the field commanders, however, went along with the official view that strong mobile reserves were at present simply not practical, due to the lack of equipment, training and transport, and that with such limited resources a strong coastal defence line was the only possible answer. Gradually, nevertheless, many of these were persuaded to change their minds by the opposers. Lieutenant General Claude Auchinleck, at this time commanding V Corps and soon to take over Southern Command, was one of these. At first he was content to echo the policy of General Ironside and the Chiefs of Staff. He wrote in an urgent and secret letter to General Sir Robert Haining, the V.C.I.G.S., on 29th June:

".... I am pretty busy here making bricks without much straw. Two divisions on a hundred mile front! However, we are getting on with it and every day makes things better, but the lack of mobile reserves is serious. At the moment we have all our goods in the front window which, in my opinion, is the right policy, as our lack of equipment and transport does not make it possible for us to fight a mobile battle in the interior. I hope we will be in a position to do so before long, as equipment seems to be coming along well, though the distribution of it seems patchy and incoherent. But this may be justified by reasons beyond my ken.

Anyway, I am sure that we should make every effort to prevent the enemy landing on the beach. I still believe that this is his most difficult task, and my recent small experience confirms me in this opinion. After all, the holding of a 'line' such as the coastline cannot be likened to the holding of a 'line' or the attempt to hold a 'line' in France, which some say was the cause of our downfall.

Until he can get his heavy stuff ashore, the enemy cannot do much. Therefore he must be prevented by all possible means from getting it ashore. At least, that is how I see it. Once he does establish himself at all securely, it won't be so easy to get him out...."

Soon, however, he was persuaded to come round to Lieutenant General Brooke's opinion. Following discussions with his superior, he summed up a more

69. Montgomery, Field Marshal the Viscount: Memoirs, pp. 68-70, Collins, London, 1958.

enterprising policy in a statement made to his senior commanders and staff officers at a conference on 9th July:

"Enemy to be stopped on beaches; but maximum possible reserve to be made available for hitting the enemy. Briefly, an offensive defensive.

A formation reserve to be organised as mobile striking forces for immediate counter-attacks against landings. Defence would NOT be passive.

War mentality must be cultivated; i.e. phrase 'IF we are attacked' should never be used; the phrase should be 'WHEN we are attacked' attack was not improbable, but was practically certain." 70.

The debate, as to whether the emphasis of the defence should be on the coast or with the mobile reserves inland, was to simmer on over the next few weeks, as was also the other fundamental and related issue of which parts of the coastline were most liable to German attack and from which direction the enemy might come. Each of the field commanders understandably sought to obtain as much strength as possible for the defence of his own particular area, while criticism of General Ironside's plan continued unabated. The commanders in the field did not always seem to realize that only General Ironside, as Commander-in-Chief, could see the picture of the defence as a whole, and had to make his plans and dispositions taking into full account the severely limited resources that existed overall as well as the threat that might come from almost any direction. Lack of liaison and co-operation between certain commanders and G.H.Q., nevertheless, combined with divergencies of opinion amongst the field commanders themselves and confusion over the plans generally, meant that all too slender reserves were being deployed in uncertain pattern, while much invaluable time and effort was being expended on the construction of static defences which were often situated in the wrong places. The urgency of the latter's construction, too, combined with the use of civilian contractors, who lacked experience of military engineering, meant that mistakes were inevitable. Many of the road blocks were useless, because A.F.V.'s could simply go round them, while some of the pillboxes were sited to face the wrong way or where they could serve no purpose, where they were far too conspicuous or could not be occupied. "We are becoming pillbox mad," wrote one divisional commander in East Anglia on finding that the garrisoning of block-houses along the system of static 'stoplines', in addition to the large number of vulnerable points, was consuming most of his manpower and

leaving too few troops available as local reserves for effective counter-attacks. The lure of so much concrete threatened to direct attention too exclusively to purely defensive measures and 'stoplines' came to be regarded as a succession of unsupported linear defensive positions. ⁷¹.

The Naval staff, meanwhile, were uneasy about the strength of the seaward defences in the Dover area, which failed to compensate for the danger stemming from the inability of large ships of the Royal Navy to manoeuvre adequately in the confined waters of the Channel, while the Air staff remained far from content about Army arrangements to defend their airfields. Grumbling about insufficient and inadequate direction from the top rumbled on and the ever-present air of uncertainty and rumour hung over all. All this, combined with the inescapable fact that Britain's land forces were still disorganised, weak and grossly outnumbered by the enemy, might have resulted in a disastrous situation if the Germans had attempted to land in force.

Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, noted in his diary at the end of June:

"Certainly everything is as gloomy as can be. Probability is that Hitler will attempt invasion in next fortnight. As far as I can see, we are, after years of leisurely preparation, completely unprepared. We have simply got to die at our posts - a far better fate than capitulating to Hitler as these damned Frogs have done. But uncomfortable." ⁷².

71. Collier, Basil: op. cit., p. 142; and WO 166/186: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, Home Forces, II Corps, 1 July 1940.

72. Dilks, David (ed.): The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945, p. 308, Macmillan, London, 1971.

CHAPTER 8: JULY PROGRESS

July had opened with a renewed spate of invasion rumours that served to heighten further the tension in these beleaguered islands. Britain's situation had improved but little since the beginning of June and she was still very weak. With the surrender of France, it was felt in many quarters that the invasion of Britain could not now be long delayed. On 1st July, General Ironside wrote in his diary:

"We seem to have passed through June and this looks like the decisive month now coming, if the Boches have made up their minds to come for us. They cannot allow us to go on bombing them, as we are doing, without doing something to stop us. They should have finished with France during this month and re-organised their forces.... The weather still remains very fine, worse luck. We could do with storms." ¹.

Renewed expectations of imminent invasion were sparked off by a Fighter Command Intelligence assessment issued that day which claimed that there were "indications that a sea and airborne expedition is in an advanced stage of preparation", and by two telegrams from Angorra and Berne which reported that "the invasion of England was planned for a date between the 7th July and 10th July". ² At 6.40 p.m. on the following day, G.H.Q., Home Forces, signalled to all Commands, "Parachutists have been captured in Reading area. All troops and local L.D.V. to be warned that parachutists are expected." ³.

The latter report was soon proved to be false, but, at 10.15 a.m. on 3rd July, the Chiefs of Staff met to hear a disturbing assessment by Major General F. G. Beaumont-Nesbitt, who was Director of Intelligence at the War Office. Pointing out that, because Britain was expecting an invasion in force, "care had to be taken that all the information which came in was not interpreted in that light", the Director of Intelligence warned the Chiefs of Staff that, nevertheless, "there was a considerable body of evidence which pointed to an invasion of this Country at an early date". He then went on to outline this evidence. In Norway there had been an increase in the number of troops in the south of the country, which included parachutists, while there was enough shipping for the transport of two divisions

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1. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 1 July 1940 (Col. R. Macleod transcript).
 2. CAB 65/8 WM(40)189th:8, 1 July 1940.
 3. WO 166/1: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, G.H.Q., Home Forces, 2 July 1940.

in Norwegian ports, and hundreds of Norwegian craft of all types had been requisitioned and armed. He added that the innumerable harbours made detailed reconnaissance very difficult and that, "We could not hope to get any long warning of an invasion from this quarter." In Denmark and Holland, too, there were reports of troop concentrations and large amounts of shipping, including special rafts and requisitioned private motorboats, being present in the North Sea and Baltic ports. Two parachute regiments had been moved to Belgium, together with "special assault detachments" which had performed well on the Western Front. Long-range guns were already being emplaced at Calais, while the concentration of large numbers of German aircraft, fuel stocks, etc., might indicate the imminence of an air offensive. The enemy, indeed, was already maintaining fighter patrols over the Calais area. The postponement from 7th July until after 10th July of a ceremonial parade in Paris, at which Hitler might declare his intention to invade Britain, however, Major General Beaumont-Nesbitt declared, "indicated that the German measures were not quite ready". The German Air Force, too, was not yet up to strength. The Chiefs of Staff agreed that, while they believed that an invasion on a large scale "would not be a practical proposition until the Germans had obtained a large measure of air superiority", it was nevertheless possible "that the enemy would throw in the whole of the resources at his command and hope to get ashore considerable numbers of troops in the general confusion". 4.

Winston Churchill, meanwhile, was becoming concerned about the 'jumpiness' of feeling in official circles in the tense atmosphere created by the constant invasion scares. Later that day, following a War Cabinet meeting, he circulated a letter to the Fighting Services and the Civil Departments in an attempt to boost morale. It read:

"On what may be the eve of an attempted invasion or battle for our native land, the Prime Minister desires to impress upon all persons holding responsible positions their duty to maintain a spirit of alert and confident energy. While every precaution must be taken that time and means allow, there are no grounds for supposing that more German troops can be landed in this country, either from the air or across the sea, than can be destroyed or captured by the strong forces at present under arms.... The Prime Minister expects all His Majesty's subjects in high places to set an example of steadiness and resolution. They should check and rebuke expressions of loose and ill-digested opinion in their circles, or by their subordinates. They should not hesitate to report or, if necessary, remove any

4. CAB 79/5 COS(40)205th:1, 3 July 1940.

officers or officials who are found to be consciously exercising a disturbing or depressing influence, and whose talk is calculated to spread alarm and despondency...." 5.

The Prime Minister learned of the latest evidence for an imminent invasion at a Defence Committee at 11.00 p.m. that same day. Sir Cyril Newall, reporting what the Chiefs of Staff had been told that morning, added that there was "nothing that could be taken as definite evidence", but warned that "there were indications from a number of directions which pointed to the imminence of invasion, which it would be unsafe to ignore". Churchill asked for a full report to be presented by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee the following day, 4th July. 6.

The report was duly completed and submitted to the Prime Minister. The J.I.C. repeated their view, reached on 1st July, as to what Germany's next move would be, now that France had collapsed:

"Our view was that there is at present little direct evidence to indicate what this next move is likely to be, and Germany's military superiority is such as to enable her to move in any direction she pleases with little or no warning."

The J.I.C. went on to list the evidence which had been reported to the Chiefs of Staff the previous day. This included a very reliable report that the German Air Force in Belgium and North-West France was in the process of being reorganised and regrouped for further operations and that this process "is nearing completion", whilst, significantly, dive-bombers were being concentrated in these areas. The report that the Germans would hold a parade of their armed forces in Paris after 10th July was also said to come "from a most reliable source", though the J.I.C. warned that some of the evidence listed "is capable of more than one interpretation" and that "the question of Germany's immediate action is much confused by the flood of tendentious reports and propaganda which are being deliberately put about". Less certain, for example, were reports that the Germans had recently practised large-scale landings at Memel in the Baltic. The J.I.C., nevertheless, declared themselves satisfied from the available evidence that Germany was making preparations for raids in force, or for invasion of

5. CAB 65/8 WM(40)192nd:15, and Appendix, 3 July 1940.

6. CAB 69/1 DC(40)19th:4, 3 July 1940.

the British Isles, though the evidence suggested that the enemy's full strength would not be developed until 15th July. The J.I.C. concluded:

"We consider large-scale raids on the British Isles involving all three arms may take place at any moment. A full-scale invasion is unlikely to take place before the middle of July. This matter is under our daily review." 7.

Over the next few days, therefore, the invasion fears temporarily subsided. On 6th July, General Ironside wrote:

"Many people now begin to doubt an invasion. Personally, I think that the Boches must have a go at us, and they will be sure to make a determined effort when they do."

On 9th July, he added:

"My morning that I thought likely for invasion, has come and gone without incident. Three Dutch Naval officers came over from Holland in a small boat. They all said that the Germans were all talking about the 11th as "Der Tag".... There can be no doubt that vast preparations in the way of air and sea invasion are being made." 8.

Then, on 10th July, came an upsurge in enemy air activity, as the Germans began an intensified offensive directed mainly against ports and shipping, especially coastal convoys, in an effort to test Britain's air defences and erode her fighter strength. That afternoon the first heavy air battle took place over the Channel. In many quarters this was taken to be a preliminary to invasion, and it was decided to stop all leave for the troops of Home Forces. A fresh crop of rumours and unconfirmed 'sightings' of parachute landings, "often accompanied by vivid and precise details," began; while Sir Edward Grigg, Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Information, reporting on the day's events to the House of Commons later added that: "Tonight thousands of our soldiers will be on the alert, waiting for an attack which may come in several places at dawn." Indeed, the rumours were such that the Ministry of Information found it expedient that evening to state officially that no enemy had "as yet" descended upon the Kingdom. 9.

7. CAB 66/9 WP(40)244; also COS(40)529 (JIC): Imminence of a German Invasion of Great Britain, Report by J.I.C., 4 July 1940.

8. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 6 & 9 July 1940, op. cit.

9. Fleming, Peter: Invasion 1940, p. 101, Hart-Davis, London, 1957.

No invasion materialised the next day, however. General Ironside notes in his diary: "Another day gone without the predicted invasion. All the more for our work." ¹⁰. The evidence still pointed to an enemy expedition from Norway, possibly against the East Coast. A War Cabinet résumé of the past week up to noon on 11th July stated:

"Increased preparations for a possible invasion of Great Britain have been reported and it is possible that, in Norway, preparations for a sea-borne expedition of two to three divisions, including some A.F.V.'s, must now be nearly complete. It is, however, still uncertain if all, or any, of these forces are intended for the invasion of the United Kingdom. Eire, the Shetlands, the Faroes and Iceland are all possible subsidiary objectives.

Air reconnaissance of Bremen and Emden has not shown the presence of any abnormal quantity of shipping. No concentration of shipping has been observed in the ports of the Low Countries and Northern France. While there is a considerable number of barges in these ports, this may be due to the interruption of other communications and does not necessarily indicate preparations for invasion." ¹¹.

The War Cabinet's weekly résumé was substantially correct in its appreciation of the German dispositions, though the enemy activities in Norway were, in reality, only ever intended as a diversion. The fears of an imminent invasion, however, were in fact entirely unfounded since, completely unbeknown in Britain at this time, it was only on 2nd July that Hitler gave orders that German staff planning to mount an invasion of England was to commence, and even then this was at first to be undertaken on the basis that invasion was still only an idea and had yet to be decided on. It was not to be until 16th July that Hitler was to issue more positive orders in the form of his Directive No. 16 for serious preparations to begin and then, too, an invasion remained conditional on the German Air Force obtaining air superiority and would only actually be launched as a final resort, if Britain failed to seek a peace.

The British seemed to sense Hitler's mood of hesitation. "I find a general idea that the Germans will not now attack us," commented General Ironside on 13th July, though he did not himself, however, share this opinion:

"A false hope, I am afraid. They daren't not do something. They will begin with some three or four days' intensive bombing, and then air landings

10. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 11 July 1940, op. cit.

11. CAB 66/9 WP(40)262; also COS(40)545: Weekly Résumé No. 45 of the Naval, Military and Air Situation, 12 July 1940.

with parachutists, followed by sea landings, according to the weather. All carried out in very different places so as to upset us and get our troops rushing about the country. If our men will attack 'à fond', all is well. But they are so dreadfully untrained that we cannot depend upon them to go in successfully."

The danger of invasion seemed, in fact, to have passed for the moment, in the opinion of official circles. The Home Commands had been informed that day that tidal conditions, especially on the East Coast, which had been favourable over the last four or five days, had now changed for the worse and that Admiralty opinion seemed to point to the 27th or 28th July as being the next most likely dates. This apparently indicated a brief respite, every single day of which would be welcomed by the harassed General Ironside, for every day would see the preparations of Home Forces a little further advanced and the equipment and training situation a fraction more improved. The General wrote:

"It is curious how one goes to bed wondering whether there will be an attack early the next morning. As we have done all we can in the way of preparation, it doesn't worry me much. I merely give thanks that we have another day of preparation and issue of defence material." 12.

Indeed, on 15th July, the War Cabinet authorised the resumption of leave for the troops of Home Forces, on a limited scale, though the Ministry of Information was instructed to take special measures to see that this fact was not publicised. 13.

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General Ironside had not been idle during these first few weeks of July. On 30th June, he had begun a second phase of movements among the formations of Home Forces. (See Map 8.) That day, 1st Armoured Division, less its 2nd Armoured Brigade and 3 R.T.R. from its 3rd Armoured Brigade, was moved by rail from Warminster, in Wiltshire, forward to the Aldershot-Guildford area. Since its arrival back from Western France less than two weeks previously, this division, which had lost almost all its tanks in the campaign, had been re-organising and re-equipping under War Office control and recovering from its ordeal. The Division had, in fact, been receiving the entire output of Cruiser tanks then being produced, and work had been

12. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 13 July 1940, op. cit.

13. CAB 65/8 WM(40)204th:4, 15 July 1940.

proceeding night and day in the depots so that there would be no delay in getting the tanks ready for issue to the troops. Now coming under the Commander-in-Chief's command, the Division was still very weak, however, consisting as it did only of 2 R.T.R. and 5 R.T.R. in 3rd Armoured Brigade. Already at Aldershot, though, was part of 1st Army Tank Brigade (including 8 R.T.R. with its 50 infantry tanks, which had been moved there a few days previously, and this formation now passed temporarily under the control of 1st Armoured Division. A third brigade was added shortly afterwards, as 20th Armoured Brigade joined the Division from East Anglia, though this possessed only a number of light and light 'wheeled' tanks. On 30th June, too, 1st Canadian Division was ordered from the Oxford area to the area of Dorking-Redhill in Surrey, a move it made by road on 2nd July, and 1st Canadian Brigade, now mobile again, rejoined its parent formation soon afterwards from Aldershot. ¹⁴.

These moves, as General Ironside had explained to the Chiefs of Staff on 29th June, effectively created a second Corps in G.H.Q. Reserve situated to the south of the barrier to movement posed by the River Thames and the great metropolis of London. (See Map 8.) This corps, situated in front of the G.H.Q. Line, was to be numbered as VII Corps, and on 7th July General Ironside sought authority from the War Office for its formation, to be commanded by the Canadian Major General A. G. L. McNaughton with the rank of Lieutenant-General. The Canadian Government concurred with this arrangement and the formation of its headquarters was officially approved on 19th July. Its staff were partly British and partly Canadian, and its headquarters were situated at Headley Court, near Leatherhead. Besides 1st Canadian Division, now under Major General G. R. Pearkes, V.C., and Major General Roger Evans's 1st British Armoured Division, VII Corps was also to include the New Zealand Force. The latter, situated just to the west of Aldershot, was soon to be expanded to divisional size, and was commanded by Major General Bernard Freyberg, V.C.. Since the Corps troops also consisted of British and Canadian units, VII Corps was to assume a truly Imperial flavour. ¹⁵.

14. WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940, and Appendices; War Diaries of 1st Armoured Division, June 1940; and CAB 69/1 DO(40)17th:1, 19 June 1940.

15. Stacey, Col. C. P.: The Canadian Army 1939-45, An Official History Summary, p. 19, Department of National Defence, Ottawa, 1948.

The splitting of the previously cumbersome G.H.Q. Reserve, which had hitherto consisted of the equivalent of three infantry and one armoured divisions, by the formation of VII Corps, was a great advance. North of the Thames, Lieutenant-General F. P. Nosworthy's IV Corps, now consisting only of 43rd (Wessex) Division, 2nd Armoured Division and 1st Armoured Reconnaissance Brigade in the area Hertfordshire to Northamptonshire, was able to concentrate its attentions entirely on planning for operations in East Anglia, or possibly Lincolnshire, and was freed from the burden of operating against an enemy landing on the South East or South Coasts, the latter task now becoming the preoccupation of VII Corps. This very sensible arrangement was to be continued in principle by General Ironside's successor. The precise role of the newly created VII Corps was summarised in G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 11, of 14th July:

"VII Corps will be in G.H.Q. Reserve, ready to move at eight hours' notice, and will act on the orders of the C.-in-C., Home Forces. It will be located as at present in the Aldershot Command and the area Redhill-Reigate-Westerham-Tonbridge.

The role of VII Corps will be to counter-attack and destroy any enemy forces invading the counties of Surrey-Kent-Sussex-Hampshire, which are not destroyed by the troops of Eastern and Southern Commands.

G.O.C. VII Corps will reconnoitre, plan and train to carry out this role in co-operation with G.O.C. XII Corps and G.O.C. Southern Command, with whom he will arrange for training facilities to practise his role. His force will be organised and trained to operate in co-ordinated mobile brigade groups, special attention being paid to the following:-

- (a) Co-operation between infantry and 'I' tanks.
- (b) Co-operation with the R.A.F..
- (c) Movement of M.T. Columns by day and by night, including traffic control and A.A. protection.

As regards (a), 'I' tanks should be employed in mass wherever possible, and against definite and worth-while objectives. The remainder of 1st Armoured Division should not be tied to the infantry, but employed as a whole to deliver a decisive stroke against the enemy flanks and rear.

Three days' preserved rations will be carried by VII Corps." 16.

A further great improvement was the delegation of part of Lieutenant-General Sir Guy Williams's equally cumbersome Eastern Command to Lieutenant-General Andrew Thorne, a highly efficient officer, who had recently

16. WO 166/1: op. cit., July 1940, Appendix G: G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 11, 14 July 1940.

commanded 48th (South Midland) Division with the B.E.F., and who had now been promoted to command XII Corps in the event of active operations. Thus, Sir Guy Williams, a competent but elderly officer who had not seen active service in the present war, was to retain command of "all troops other than G.H.Q. Reserves now in the Eastern Command area and north of the Thames", while Thorne would have a similar responsibility for those troops of Eastern Command which were situated to the south of the Thames. Until active operations occurred, however, the G.O. C.-in-C., Eastern Command, would continue to be responsible for the administration of all the troops, excluding those in G.H.Q. Reserve, in his Command. ¹⁷.

General Ironside also carried out some other significant changes in the early part of July. Not the least of these was the move, on 1st and 2nd July, of his own Headquarters from Kneller Hall to St. Paul's School, Kensington, which was both more spacious and much nearer the Government at Westminster. Lieutenant-General Sir Alan Brooke's requests for more troops to be allocated to Southern Command, too, shortly bore fruit. General Ironside soon allotted a second Corps headquarters to Southern Command, in view of the increasing threat against the lengthy South Coast from Western France. Its formation was officially approved by the War Office on 19th July. Numbered VIII Corps, its headquarters was established at Pyrland Hall, Taunton, in Somerset, and the able Major General Sir Harold Franklyn, who had distinguished himself in the retreat to Dunkirk as commander of 5th (Regular) Division, was given the command. The new VIII Corps would have the responsibility of guarding the hitherto virtually undefended areas of Devon and Cornwall, as well as part of Somerset. For this task, it was allotted the 48th (South Midland) Division, which was moved to South Devon from Gloucestershire by 10th July, and the Independent 70th Brigade, which took up position in the Exeter area following the disbandment of its parent 23rd (Northumbrian) Division. A second brigade of the latter division, 69th Brigade, was given to 50th (Northumbrian) Division of V Corps, to strengthen the coastal area of Dorset. The troops of VIII Corps who, like those of V Corps, had fought in France and Belgium, immediately set about constructing beach defences along the South Devon and South Cornish Coasts, thus extending the coastal 'crust' along the entire South Coast from Kent to Cornwall. Nevertheless, VIII Corps, with only a single division and an independent brigade at its immediate disposal, with a very long coastline to defend and

17. WO 166/1: op. cit., July 1940, Appendix J: Order Issued for Conduct of Active Operations in Eastern Command, pending decision of re-organisation of that Command, 15 July 1940.

a considerable distance from the nearest mobile reserves, clearly could not withstand an enemy attack in force; therefore, work was started on a strong inland 'stopline' of anti-tank obstacles and over 300 pillboxes, stretching from the River Parrett's estuary near Bridgewater across the narrow neck of the peninsula just east of Taunton to Seaton on the River Axe's estuary. Called the 'Taunton stopline', this relatively short defence line was built as the main defensive feature to halt any incursion to the east if the enemy should succeed in establishing himself in the western part of the peninsula.^{18.} The latter situation, in fact, seemed very possible in July 1940. Brooke, visiting beach defences in South Devon on 10th July, wrote afterwards:

".... much more work and drive required.... From what I have seen, I am not happy at the state of the defences in these parts; people have not yet realized the danger of attack." ^{19.}

Lieutenant-General Brooke was also given a call on further reinforcements to Southern Command, if this were warranted by an emergency. The Australian Infantry Force in Wiltshire, temporarily in G.H.Q. Reserve, but then placed under War Office control, would be made available to him if necessary. This Force, soon to be two brigades strong, remained, however in July, still largely untrained and ill-equipped. Lieutenant-General Brooke, visiting them on 28th June, declared, "It will take at least a month before any of them are ready for any active operation." While, on 16th July, General Ironside, also having paid them a visit, wrote:

"They are very raw and untrained, but are beginning to get in trim. Things will go quickly once they have their equipment. They mean to fight if called upon to do so. As usual, discipline a little lax...." ^{20.}

Additional formations were soon placed within supporting distance of VIII and V Corps. Winston Churchill's visit on 2nd July to 3rd (Regular) Division on the Sussex Coast and the frank opinions of its outspoken commander, Major General Bernard Montgomery, had made a considerable impact on the Prime Minister who, like 'Monty', was very much in favour of increasing the numbers of formations with the mobile reserves. A peeved General Ironside wrote, on 9th July:

18. WO 166/1: op. cit., July 1940; and War Diaries of VIII Corps, July 1940.

19. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 10 July 1940.

20. ibid., 28 June 1940; and Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 16 July 1940, op. cit.

"The Prime Minister has sent down an order, or what is practically an order, to withdraw two divisions from the beach-line. I have sent in to say that I can withdraw one in a few days. He has his son-in-law, now Captain Sandys, on his staff and he uses him as a go-between with my staff. It is difficult to tackle Winston when he is in one of his go-getter humours." 21.

General Ironside naturally selected the 3rd (Regular) Division to be withdrawn. Highly trained, well led, the best equipped formation in the Country (though, on 2nd July, it still had only 36 x 25 pdr. field guns), now fully mobile with its recently acquired buses and, in any case, earmarked for Eire or various other possible overseas operations, it was clearly the obvious choice. Orders were issued from G.H.Q., Home Forces, for the move the very next day and, on 11th July, it took up position in the Gloucester-Cheltenham-Cirencester area, recently occupied by 48th (South Midland) Division. (See Map 8.) Unlike its predecessor, however, it was placed, at least for a while, in G.H.Q. Reserve and was instructed "immediately to be prepared to undertake mobile operations in new area", which meant, in fact, not just towards the South Coast but virtually in any direction. The rapid progress in the beach defences of the Brighton-Littlehampton stretch of coastline, effected during the last few weeks under Montgomery's eagle eye, meanwhile allowed the coastline to be manned by various miscellaneous or 'sedentary' troops in this sector, backed by the newly formed 1st Motor Machine Gun Brigade poised, 'Leopard'-like, on the easily defensible obstacle of the South Downs, incidentally perhaps the first practical example of Churchill's hypothesis for defence actually being applied. 22.

The 3rd (Regular) Division in its new area was also to be supported by 21st Army Tank Brigade, which was ordered to a position just south of Devizes on 12th July and also came into G.H.Q. Reserve. This partly-trained Territorial formation, which had not been to France, was ordered as follows:

"While continuing your training, your Brigade will prepare, with such resources as it has, to co-operate in an emergency with 3rd Division, if so ordered by G.H.Q..... You will form all available battle-worthy A.F.V.'s into a composite unit, suitably organised for the possible tasks.... All A.F.V.'s that can be gunned will be included. In addition, such of your transport as remains will be utilised to carry any surplus armed personnel who will be organised into a suitable unit.... When general issue of 'I' tanks to your Brigade begins (estimated 3-4 weeks), you will report when the training tanks can be withdrawn for other units." 23.

21. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 9 July 1940, op. cit.

22. WO 166/1: op. cit., July 1940.

23. ibid., Appendix E: G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 9, 12 July 1940.

In fact, 21st Army Tank Brigade had a mere 16 Matilda Mk. II's distributed among its three tank regiments; its theoretical establishment should have been 150. (See Appendix 8.) The Brigade provided virtually the only tank reserve available to Southern Command. This example of optimistic improvisation typifies the state of Home Forces in the early summer of 1940. Lieutenant-General Sir Alan Brooke's comment, the following day, was something of an understatement:

".... I feel that I require a great deal more time to complete arrangements in the Command. There is a lot of work to do and many officers to be replaced.... We are painfully thin on the ground." 24.

The question of the defence of Scotland was another continuing cause of concern to the military authorities. General Ironside had told the Chiefs of Staff Committee, on 25th June, that:

"The defensive organisation in Scotland was less well advanced than in England, though the area south of the Firth and Clyde was already well defended. North of this line defences were weak and consisted mainly of isolated battalions in strong points. In the Shetlands there was one battalion with some guns. The battalion was 950 strong and should be able to deal with any raid on the islands." 25.

At this time, though, the Chiefs of Staff were far more worried about the defence of England, where attack was thought to be more likely. General Ironside shared their view and, despite the reports of German troop and shipping concentrations in Norway at the beginning of July compared with the relative absence of such signs in the Low Countries and France, he at first steadfastly and correctly, in view of the severely limited resources available to Home Forces, maintained that it was England that should receive total priority for defence. The Commander-in-Chief wrote, on 5th July:

"Everything seems to point to the Germans starting something from Norway and the Baltic against Iceland, the Shetlands or perhaps Scotland. I have only the troops necessary for the barest defence there and cannot send any of my reserve up to the north, for that will be the thing that the Germans will want me to do. I shall have screams from Scotland to go and save them, but I shall have to try and resist that, or I shall not have the people ready in the south for the main thrust...." 26.

24. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 13 July 1940.

25. CAB 79/5 COS(40)193rd:2, 25 June 1940.

26. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 5 July 1940, op. cit.

As the reports from Norway persisted, however, General Ironside realized that the defences of Scotland must be strengthened to some extent. Hitherto, 9th (Scottish) Division had been responsible for Scotland's defence from the Firth of Forth northwards to the Shetlands, while the weakened 5th (Regular) Division guarded the Scottish borders. (See Maps 6 and 8.) The remainder of 49th (West Riding) Division had departed for Iceland from the Clyde on 26th June, while the severely mauled remnants of 51st (Highland) Division, recovering their strength in Galloway after their ordeal in Western France, were in no fit condition to do anything. Over the next few days, therefore, General Ironside moved the 5th (Regular) Division to the Central Lowlands of Scotland to relieve the vastly overstretched 9th (Scottish) Division of part of their burden, while on 13th July, 7 R.T.R., part of 1st Army Tank Brigade at Aldershot, was ordered to Scotland to provide Scottish Command with some tanks. Despite these improvements, the Chiefs of Staff noted on 15th July that, "In view of the reported troop concentrations in Norway, the defences of Scotland seemed very light." ²⁷. Indeed, the 9th (Scottish) Division was a semi-trained, ill-equipped, second-line Territorial formation; the 5th Division, though trained and battle experienced, had had two of its brigades much weakened by losses of personnel and equipment in the withdrawal to Dunkirk; while 7 R.T.R., with about 35 slow Matilda Mk. II infantry tanks, could be of value only locally in a vast area, and its addition in reality succeeded merely in weakening the armoured reserves in South East England.

* * *

To gain a first-hand knowledge of the state of morale, training and equipment of the formations under his command and of the progress of the defence works, General Ironside devoted as much of his time as possible to a series of personal inspections. He had already inspected beach defences in East Anglia, Lincolnshire and the South East and South Coasts round to the Isle of Wight, in June, and in July he extended his visits to the reserve formations, starting with the 1st Canadian Division in Surrey on 6th July. At first, he was pessimistic. "We want a good many months before we can possibly be ready to put the troops we have called up into action," he wrote on 4th July. "They are untrained and unequipped." The essential equipment needed both to re-arm the formations of the B.E.F. and to bring the original Home Defence Divisions up to establishment was only just beginning to come forward quickly from the factories:

27. CAB 79/5 COS(40)222nd:5, 15 July 1940.

"I am told that mass production is only just beginning and one can only hope that Industry will be able to get going without being smashed up by bombing."

General Ironside was pleased, however, to see things gradually improving. "Every week gives us something more in hand, and training is now going better," he noted on 6th July. He added two days later:

"Our fortifications are getting better every day. Our L.D.V. are being steadily armed and we could soon reduce the number of mobile troops that are being used for a static role. It is all a matter of time. We are working against time."

On 14th July, he visited Lieutenant-General Nosworthy's IV Corps in G.H.Q. Reserve. "Nosworthy has his Corps in fine order and is an efficient leader, full of enthusiasm and confidence," he wrote that evening. The 2nd Armoured Division, under Major General J. C. Tilly, he found had now been re-armed and was "in good condition". Its Support Group included two R.H.A. batteries with brand-new 25 pdr. field guns, while its two Yeomanry Regiments were now commanded by Regular Cavalry officers and had "a high state of efficiency". "I felt much more happy after seeing such a good show," he wrote afterwards; and on concluding three days' hard work of inspection with a visit to Lieutenant-General Sir Alan Brooke's Southern Command on 16th July, he commented with satisfaction:

".... I was glad to see an immense amount of defence work had been done since I was last there.... Things are much better and every day makes a difference.... I noticed no 'defeatism' at all. What there is, is now among certain intellectuals." 28.

"And now it has come to us to stand alone in the breach and face the worst that the tyrant's might and enmity can do....", so came forth the stirring words of Winston Churchill in a broadcast to the Nation on 14th July, in a tone that left no doubt of Britain's determination to resist:

"We are fighting by ourselves alone. But we are not fighting for ourselves alone.... Here, girt about by the seas and oceans where the Navy reigns; shielded from above by the prowess and devotion of our airmen - we await undismayed the impending assault. Perhaps it will come tonight, perhaps it will come next week, perhaps it will never come. We must show ourselves equally capable of meeting a sudden violent shock or what is perhaps a harder task, a prolonged vigil. But be the ordeal sharp or long,

28. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 4, 6, 8, 14 & 16 July 1940, op. cit.

or both, we shall seek no terms, we shall tolerate no parley, we may show no mercy - we ask none." 29.

Three days later, General Ironside noted in his diary:

"We have reached another morning without any active operations by the Boches.... There are tentative statements in the papers about a 'peace ultimatum', but nothing very definite. Winston's speech in the House the other day ought to have dissipated any hopes of our people having become intimidated like the French. Winston minced no words. I wonder if the Boches think that their present bombardment is better than it is. Will they increase it in violence as they find we continue firm? I am sure that any honest effort at peace will find a following here in England, but we all know that we cannot trust the Boches at all.... But the show is warming up one way or another. We have had seventeen days in July which I would never have expected to get." 30.

Two days afterwards, on 19th July, Hitler made his final 'peace offer' in a speech in the Kroll Opera House in Berlin, only to have it contemptuously rejected in an unauthorised statement by the B.B.C. less than sixty minutes later. The War Cabinet did not even bother seriously to consider Hitler's proposal, though Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, issued a firm refusal to the offer in a broadcast on 22nd July. The Royal Navy was by now fully disposed to meet an invasion, while the R.A.F., given a valuable breathing space after Dunkirk in which to recoup its losses, had already begun to demonstrate its determination in the opening phase of the struggle in the air. How ready, however, were Britain's preparations to resist invasion on land, by the latter half of July, and how effective would have been the various elements of General Ironside's plan, if the Germans had landed at this time and they had been put to the test?

The answer is that, while much progress had been made since the end of May, there was still a great deal more work to do, and that many of the preparations already made would in fact have been singularly ineffective. The greatest 'white elephant' was undoubtedly the main G.H.Q. Line, together with the lesser Corps and Divisional 'stoplines' between the main line and the coast. This system of 'stoplines', or 'lines of no withdrawal' by Army definition, was intended to gain time for the mobile G.H.Q. Reserves to be concentrated to meet any threatened attack; the G.H.Q. Line itself, where built, consisted of a continuous anti-tank obstacle covered by pillboxes of

29. B.B.C. Broadcast by Sir Winston Churchill, 14 July 1940 (following a speech in the House of Commons).

30. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 17 July 1940, op. cit.

various types. The anti-tank obstacle was often a river line, the river being dredged out and the banks raised where the river or stream was shallow and normally fordable by tanks, as, for example, along Debden Water, a tributary of the upper River Cam in North-West Essex. The Rivers Great Ouse, Cam, upper Chelmer, Medway, Eden, Blackwater and the Somerset Avon were utilised, together with the Kennet and Avon Canal. Elsewhere, railway embankments, steep slopes and even lakes or inundated gravel-pits were used. Failing any natural or existing man-made obstacle, an artificial one had to be created. On the main G.H.Q. Line and on forward 'stoplines', a wide and deep 'V' shaped anti-tank ditch, some 20-30 feet across and sometimes revetted with brushwood and logs, was excavated, using civilian mechanical diggers. The ditch was crossed at various points by temporary wooden bridges for vehicles and people, which could be removed quickly if necessary. Anti-tank mines were, at first, generally reserved for beach exits, rather than for use inland, but sometimes single or double lines of large concrete blocks or truncated concrete pyramids were used, as, for example, on the Taunton 'stopline', near that town itself. All trees along the defended lines were felled, so as to provide a clear line of fire, the stumps being left to make additional obstacles to tanks. ³¹.

On the main G.H.Q. Line the building of the defences, often using civilian contractors, had made good headway in East Anglia and the South East by late July. Every bridge crossing the water obstacles of the G.H.Q. Line could either be blocked at short notice with rows of portable concrete cylinders, with truncated cone concrete 'dollies', or by using iron rails that could be slotted either vertically or horizontally into prepared holes, or else was prepared for demolition. In addition, all possible crossings of the anti-tank obstacle were covered by a group of mutually supporting pill-boxes of various standard types. A typical road bridge might be covered, for example, by a rectangular anti-tank pillbox built to house a 2 pdr. gun, often with a built-in Bren chamber, flanked at a short distance by one or two usually hexagonal pillboxes designed to take the Bren L.M.G.; further Bren pillboxes were sited at fairly regular intervals along the anti-tank obstacle, so as to sweep it in enfilade with interlocking arcs of fire. Most main-line pillboxes had walls 3'6" to 4' thick, with overhead protection 1' thick and had firing slits at the sides and rear for all-round defence. Sometimes, trench type infantry positions, well sandbagged, or

31. Fieldwork by the writer, including questioning of local people resident in 1940, October 1979 - March 1980.

later concrete lined pits for spigot mortars were used instead of pillboxes, especially where the water obstacle to be covered was wide and clearly impassable except at bridges or on the lesser 'stoplines'. Both pillboxes and earthworks were often cleverly camouflaged and were, ideally, carefully wired in, if wire were available. ³².

The G.H.Q. Line and the system of forward 'stoplines', however, were destined never to be completed. The main G.H.Q. Line only ever neared full completion from Cambridge via Chelmsford to the River Thames and from thence round via Maidstone, Tonbridge and Reigate to, approximately, Guildford. This was the most vital section, since it covered the direct approaches to London from East Anglia and the South East. From Guildford to Bristol, and from Cambridge north to The Wash, the G.H.Q. Line consisted merely of a mainly water obstacle, backed by scattered strongpoints. Any wide out-flanking movement by a highly mobile enemy who had secured a substantial lodgement in the South East or East Anglia, therefore, might have met little resistance from the G.H.Q. Line and been able to approach the capital from its most vulnerable side, the north-west, where the latter's own ring of anti-tank obstacle and pillbox defences was the weakest. Moreover, the G.H.Q. Line was in fact planned, but never built, in the area from The Wash northwards through Lincolnshire and the Vale of York. In these areas of Northern Command, the only static defences inland were scattered pillboxes, sited to cover vulnerable points such as airfields, crossroads or bridges, or used as roadblocks, as, for example, on the Great North Road where pillboxes were built singly or in mutually supporting pairs on every rise, so as to have a good field of fire. ³³.

The only significant forward 'stoplines', too, known to be reasonably completed in England were in the XII Corps sector in Kent, from Graveney Marshes via just east of Canterbury to Dover, facing north-east so as to contain any advance from enemy landings on beaches from Whitstable round the Isle of Thanet to Deal; as well as along the entire length of the Royal Military Canal in S.E. Kent and along the line of the River Rother possibly to beyond Heathfield in East Sussex, also in XII Corps sector, to guard the equally vulnerable beaches either side of Dungeness Point and around

32. *ibid.*; correspondence with Henry Wills, 25 March 1980; and Wills, H.: Pillboxes: A Study of U.K. Defences, 1940, pp. 15-38, Leo Cooper, London, 1985.

33. Interview with General Sir Ronald Forbes Adam, formerly G.O. C.-in-C., Northern Command, 27 February 1980.

Winchelsea and Bexhill-Pevensey; from the coast near Colchester to Bury St. Edmunds and from thence probably to Littleport on the G.H.Q. Line in East Anglia, to cover the miles of exposed beaches on the Norfolk, Suffolk and N.E. Essex coastlines; and, finally, the aforementioned strong Taunton 'stopline' in the South West.³⁴ Of these, neither the Canterbury 'stopline' nor the line in East Anglia were able to make particular use of natural anti-tank obstacles, though the former made some use of railway embankments and the latter of the Rivers Stour and Lark. Otherwise, it seems, the remainder of the forward 'stoplines' which had been provisionally planned, sometimes surveyed and in some cases even begun, were either never intended to be properly fortified or, more likely, were cancelled towards the end of July due to a change in policy introduced by General Ironside's successor as C.-in-C., Home Forces.

Would these 'stoplines' have served their purpose in preventing the German tanks from "tearing the guts out of the Country"? At least, only for a very short time. The G.H.Q. Line pillboxes were spaced on average some two or three hundred yards apart and were, theoretically, able to bring to bear an efficient crossfire at any point along the line of the anti-tank obstacle, but in most places the line completely lacked any sort of depth and if breached, at any point, the whole of the rest of the line would have been immediately rendered useless. Only occasionally was there a second line of defence, consisting of a further line of pillboxes similarly spaced and sited, often on higher ground, though lacking the anti-tank obstacle, as, for example, on the G.H.Q. Line to the south of Chelmsford. Where constructed, the second line would be situated several hundred yards to the rear of the first and would be able to cover the pillboxes of the first line.³⁵ Both the G.H.Q. Line and the forward 'stoplines' would require vast numbers of troops, very thinly spread, to man them fully, though the G.H.Q. Line, at least, was expected to be primarily manned by the L.D.V.. Moreover, although the pillboxes were built specially to house certain weapon types, for example the 2 pdr. anti-tank gun, these were very often simply not available. The majority of the pillboxes on the G.H.Q. Line were designed to accommodate up to five Bren L.M.G.'s each, with four to eight men manning a typical pillbox and the remainder of the section either in a

34. Correspondence with Henry Wills, 25 March 1980; and German Documents for Operation Sea Lion: Map, 'Durch Luftbild festgestellte Befestigungen in Südostengland', 10 October 1940, Imperial War Museum Library.

35. Fieldwork by the writer, October 1979 - March 1980.

sandbagged trench nearby or in a second pillbox with more Brens, if there were a pair of them. By mid-July, however, most L.D.V. units had at most a single L.M.G. per platoon, let alone even one per section, and this was almost invariably an aged Lewis gun, not a Bren, while a large proportion of the L.D.V. still lacked even rifles! The 4th (Guildford) Battalion, Surrey Home Guard, for example, responsible for the defence of the G.H.Q. Line within the borough boundaries, only received their first batch of rifles on 17th July and by 31st July still had a mere 420 rifles and 30 shot guns between 850 Volunteers. Their rifles had at most 20 rounds of S.A.A. apiece.³⁶ Regular troops, mainly manning the forward 'stoplines', would doubtless have been both better equipped and better trained, but would have been equally overstretched. All in all, the G.H.Q. Line and most of the forward 'stoplines', whether planned or actually built, really represented 'Magenot Line thinking' at its very worst and their greatest benefit was probably one of morale only, since at least both troops and civilians could see widespread evidence that something was being done to defend the Country. The Germans had, in fact, already developed efficient tactics to deal with such pillboxes and anti-tank obstacles from their experiences with the Maginot Line. However, with a plentiful supply of concrete, with local contractors and labour available, with the L.D.V. and many of the troops not adequately trained or equipped for offensive action, coupled with a lack of tanks to provide mobile pillboxes or means of counter-attack, the system of 'stoplines' seemed the best solution that General Ironside could devise in the circumstances.

In addition to the main lines that were formed throughout June and July, collections of local defence works were often sited around particular objects to be protected, such as river crossings, airfields, railway yards, factories, bridges, public utilities and fuel depots. Some of the larger towns in the South East and East Anglia had pillboxes or sandbagged positions sited at street corners and road junctions, usually manned by the local L.D.V.. Around many smaller towns and villages in these areas, too, were roadblocks to prevent the rapid advance of German mobile columns, covered by similar L.D.V.-manned defences. The pillboxes, where used, for all these widely distributed local defences, were generally small ones designed for riflemen, though on some airfields mobile pillboxes were to be seen, consisting of concrete pipes mounted on lorries that could be driven

36. Various authors: A History of the Guildford Home Guard, 18th May 1940 - 31st December 1944, p. 5, Guildford, 1945.

out into the centre of the runways, also steel retractable pillboxes in the runways themselves or, eventually, massive six-foot thick many-sided pillboxes, well wired in and designed to take Vickers H.M.G.'s for perimeter defence and sometimes even with A.A. machine guns mounted on the roofs (for example at Debden Airfield, a vital fighter Sector Station in Essex). Many of the small local pillboxes, together with some of those on the 'stoplines' or on the coasts, were ingeniously camouflaged to resemble cottages, extensions to buildings, barns, cattlesheds, huts and even haystacks, teashops or advertising hoardings or, on the coast, beach-huts and kiosks! ³⁷. Many mistakes, too, were inevitably made in the positioning and construction of these local defences and examples are legion. On the Great North Road, for instance, one pillbox had to be pulled down soon after it was built, because it was found to obstruct half the traffic flow on this vital arterial route. ³⁸.

It was, however, the actual beaches and their immediate hinterland that would be in the forefront of any attempt at invasion. Progress on the beach defences by mid July varied greatly. Generally speaking, the most vulnerable beaches, those of East Anglia, East Kent and the South Coast as far as the Isle of Wight, were now mostly obstructed and covered by fire. Coils of triple Dannert concertina wire festooned the upper beaches, while lines of solid concrete blocks were beginning to make their appearance to bar egress from the beaches to tanks and vehicles where there were no sea-walls or cliffs. Anti-tank minefields, together with further barbed wire entanglements and concrete obstacles, were being placed in beach exits. All these obstacles were sited to hold up the attacker under close-range small arms fire, while artillery fire-plans were carefully worked out so as to cover all the beaches. Sea-walls, padded out with sandbags, became infantry breastworks and themselves provided a ready anti-tank obstacle, though soon, as at Southend-on-Sea in Essex, a line of concrete blocks would often be added at the top of the sea-wall to further increase the obstacle. Infantrymen also manned rifle pits, sandbagged firing trenches, or even concrete sewer pipes specially set into the upper beaches. Machine-gun posts were established at the ends of piers, in sandbagged positions roofed with stout timber covered with sand, in newly constructed pillboxes, or in kiosks, cafés or other buildings strengthened by a sandbag or concrete inner wall,

37. Wills, H.: op. cit., pp. 58-64; and fieldwork by the writer, October 1979 - March 1980.

38. Interview with General Sir Ronald Forbes Adam, op. cit., 27 Feb. 1980.

while 19th century forts, Napoleonic Martello Towers or even older coastal defences were wired into provide ready-made self-contained strongpoints. Nearly 150 guns, mostly 6" in batteries of two, had by now been established by the Admiralty, working at great speed under the Emergency Beach Battery Programme, and these provided the nuclei for further strongpoints. Strongly built concrete or iron rail roadblocks had been established on roads leading inland from the beaches and at intervals along the promenades, while the landward ends of piers, jetties and the more substantial breakwaters had been blown up to prevent enemy ships from unloading onto them. Various anti-boat boom defences to protect against the expected specially designed enemy landing-craft, together with anti-submarine nets, had been placed across the Thames and Humber estuaries and the Plymouth Sound, in addition to those already in place at Dover, Harwich and Rosyth. Lighter and simpler boom defences were to be placed so as to hinder access to the most vulnerable open beaches, though these were soon found to be difficult to lay and vulnerable to the elements. At many of the smaller ports, such as Newhaven or Ramsgate, blockships stood ready to be swung into position and sunk across the harbour mouth. Demolition plans now existed to deny the enemy the use of any East or South Coast port if that became necessary, while some provision was made at many ports for all-round defence. The Admiralty had placed a number of fixed torpedo tubes in suitable positions to protect harbours or estuaries; the Dover defences were being added to by the provision of further long and medium-range guns, as well as close-in defences, and the Dover minefield was being thickened up. ³⁹.

How strong were the beach defences by the middle of July, however? The beaches were only ever properly fortified between The Wash and Cornwall, and by this date little work had yet been carried out on beach defences further west than the Isle of Wight. On the West Coast and north of The Wash, where only raids were anticipated, the beaches remained virtually unfortified and were only guarded by a chain of watchers and by constant patrolling, later mainly by the Home Guard, except at vital points where Regular battalions on a wide front manned mainly earthwork defences. There was no continuous anti-tank obstacle, while very few pillboxes were built on the coasts in Scottish, Western or Northern Commands. Some of the few pillboxes that were built in Northern Command were constructed in a line

39. Collier, Basil: op. cit., pp. 132-133, H.M.S.O., London, 1957; and CAB 65/14 W11(40)198th:3, 9 July 1940.

along some sandstone cliffs just to the north of the River Humber in the East Riding of Yorkshire. It was noted that a line of First World War pill-boxes already existed at the top of the beach below these cliffs, but it was only later discovered that these latter pillboxes had, in fact, slipped down the steep slope due to the cliff having receded some 20 or 30 feet, a fate which was shortly to happen to the brand-new pillboxes on top! ⁴⁰. The newly promoted Lieutenant-General Harold R. L. G. Alexander, on arriving at 1 Corps H.Q. at Doncaster shortly after its return from Dunkirk, found that "the most prominent defence works dated from Napoleonic times"! ⁴¹.

On the East Anglian and South-East Coasts, too, the beach defences, though far more advanced than elsewhere, were still far from complete. Flimsy coils of barbed wire were only just beginning to be replaced by more substantial and well wired builders' scaffolding at the top of the more open beaches, and the provision of solid concrete anti-tank blocks was at an early stage, while further builders' scaffolding placed below the high-water mark and armed with mines was still a thing of the future. More anti-tank landmines were still desperately required. Combined with the severe shortage of anti-tank guns, therefore, there was as yet little available to stop enemy tanks from rapidly debouching inland from the beaches. Winston Churchill, visiting beaches in St. Margaret's Bay, near Dover, about this time, was informed by the Brigadier of 2nd London Brigade that:

".... he had only three anti-tank guns in his brigade, covering four or five miles of this highly-menaced coastline. He declared that he had only six rounds of ammunition for each gun, and he asked me with a slight air of challenge whether he was justified in letting his men fire one single round for practice in order that they might at least know how the weapon worked. I replied that we could not afford practice rounds and that fire should be held for the last moment at the closest range." ⁴².

There was still, moreover, a great shortage of the necessary field guns to give an adequate weight to the artillery fire-plans; the troops on the coast were often very thinly spread; and many of the hastily built and often improvised defence works were improperly sited, sometimes with buildings obscuring the line of fire, or the main embrasures of pillboxes sited

40. Interview with General Sir Ronald Forbes Adam, op. cit., 27 Feb. 1980.

41. Nicolson, Nigel: Alex: The Life of Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis, p. 116, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1973.

42. Churchill, W. S.: Vol. II, Their Finest Hour, p. 148, Cassell, London, 1949.

to fire out to sea instead of so as to provide for more effective flanking fire. It is clear that a determined assault, using assault engineers, amphibious or submersible tanks led by fast, light infantry assault boats in the first wave and dive bombers as artillery instead of naval bombardment, all of which the Germans were in fact already planning to use, would have suffered losses, but would have secured a lodgement at many places without a great deal of difficulty, thus nullifying the effort and resources spent by the British on defending the beaches in other sectors.

The successful defence of the coastline really depended on the presence of sufficient and well trained, equipped and motivated, immediate local mobile reserves for instant counter-attack, backed by equally prepared larger mobile reserves under Corps or even Command control to deal with major breaches of the coastal 'crust'. Here again, much progress had been made by the latter half of July, but inadequacies still continued to abound. At first the coastal divisions had had, of necessity, to position the bulk of their troops along the coastline itself in an outdated form of linear defence, with little local depth. Gradually, however, as the coastal defences themselves were improved, as more equipment came from the factories and improvised sources or, starting in mid-July, from the United States of America, and as further vehicles, such as buses or coaches, were requisitioned by the military from their civilian owners, the Divisional Commanders were able to withdraw more and more troops for training as local mobile reserves. The process was an agonisingly slow one, especially for all the more offensively-minded commanders, but it was a steady process nonetheless. By mid-July, a typical arrangement of mobile defence in depth was just beginning to emerge in many of the most vulnerable areas to supplement the Regular troops manning the forward static defences, who were themselves gradually being relieved by more sedentary troops. Thus, the actual beach defences would be held by Section and Platoon posts within the Company positions. Small local reserves would generally be provided within each Battalion on the coast by the Carrier Platoons and perhaps by an anti-parachute Platoon, mounted on bicycles. Decisions on the layout of the beach defences were generally made at Brigade level and each Brigade usually held a Battalion in local reserve some six miles inland, so that it could move on foot, on bicycles or in buses to the point of attack. Brigades were ideally to be positioned 'two up', with a third brigade in divisional reserve that could

be moved forward as the battle plan became clearer, or be available to recapture any coastal airfields which enemy airborne forces might seize. 43.

This last arrangement, however, was rarely attained as early as July 1940. In most cases, all three of the Brigades had to be disposed near the coastline, as, for example, in 45th (West Country) Division's lengthy sector in East Sussex and South East Kent (under Major General E. C. A. Schreiber) where its 136th Brigade was responsible for the Eastbourne area, its 134th Brigade for the Bexhill-Hastings area and its 135th Brigade (transferred back from 1st London Division at the beginning of July) for the Rye to Dymchurch sector, and where the divisional reserves merely consisted of, in the main, a few troops of the improvised 'Ironsides', a tiny handful of 2 pdr. anti-tank guns, and a meagre assortment of divisional artillery. 44. In fact, among the five divisions ranged along the coast in Eastern Command, only 1st London Division, which had received the addition of 198th Brigade from 66th (Lancs. and Border) Division at the end of June, and 35th Brigade from 12th (Eastern) Division on 10th July, and thus now consisted of four brigades, was lucky enough to be able to hold a reasonably sized local reserve. This consisted of no less than two infantry brigades, 1st London Brigade just east of Canterbury and 2nd London Brigade to the north of Folkestone and Hythe, both having been made fully mobile for a counter-attacking role, mainly by the use of requisitioned civilian lorries, vans and coaches. The actual coastline in 1st London Division's sector was held in mid-July by 35th Brigade in the Isle of Sheppey-Whitstable area, 198th Brigade on and around the Isle of Thanet, some 3,000 Royal Marines in the Deal garrison, various miscellaneous and training units which made up the Dover garrison which also guarded Folkestone, and the Shorncliffe garrison which had responsibility for the coastline from Sandgate to the Dymchurch redoubt. Since the 35th and 198th Brigades consisted of insufficiently trained second-line Territorial troops, the coastal 'crust' was, therefore, largely manned by sedentary troops, with the two better trained first-line Territorial brigades acting as the 'Leopards'. Thus, on the face of it, 1st London Division's dispositions were more satisfactory than those of the other divisions on the coastline of Eastern Command and, indeed, elsewhere in the Country. Notwithstanding, 1st London Division still only possessed 34 field guns, a mixed bag of 18 pdrs., 4.5" howitzers, 25 pdrs. and even a

43. Nicolson, Nigel: op. cit., p. 116; and interview with Lt.-Col. J. Nigel St. G. Kirke, formerly G.S.O. 3(Ops.) 45th Division, 11 Aug. 1981.

44. Interview with Lt.-Col. J. Nigel St. G. Kirke, op. cit., 11 Aug. 1981; and WO 166: op. cit., 45th Division, July 1940.

few 13 pdrs. on 5th July, compared with 23 field guns on 31st May, and, though the division admittedly did have the benefit of the guns of the coastal fixed defences and 'emergency' batteries, it could by July still only boast 12 assorted 4", 12 pdr. and 3 pdr. guns with a speculative anti-tank capacity. Only eight of the latter were mobile; there were no modern 2 pdr. anti-tank guns or tanks; while the division was disposed to meet an attack from the most easterly beaches rather than from the south-east; ammunition of all types was terribly short and there was none to spare for practice. The beach defences were still incomplete with little effectively to stop enemy tanks, the seaward defences had yet to be further strengthened, the units on the coast spent most of their time digging, wiring and preparing defences rather than in training, and virtually no troops of the division, except for 35th Brigade, had ever seen a shot fired in anger. Major General C. F. Liardet, 1st London Division's commander, had good reason to call its situation "ludicrous".⁴⁵

Corps reserves, too, were almost non-existent in mid-July (see Map 8), especially in Eastern and Southern Commands where the main reliance was on the G.H.Q. Reserves, though in East Anglia Major General J. S. Drew's reasonably well equipped, mobile and battle-experienced 52nd (Lowland) Division was poised east of Cambridge to move rapidly by brigade groups to reinforce any of the three ill-equipped, insufficiently trained and inexperienced divisions stretched along the long East Anglian coastline, while 37th Brigade from the broken up 12th (Eastern) Division was soon moved to Norwich to undertake a similar role in Norfolk or in the vicinity of Lowestoft in Suffolk. Neither XII Corps in the South East, V Corps in the South, the newly created VIII Corps in the South West of England, nor the whole of Scottish Command, had any substantial formations in reserve under Corps control. The exception was in Lieutenant-General Sir R. F. Adam's Northern Command, which was mostly out of effective reach of the G.H.Q. Reserves, where both Lieutenant-General H. R. L. G. Alexander's I Corps to the south of Flamborough Head and Lieutenant-General Holmes's to the north, had a pair of divisions covering the coast and a third division in Corps reserve placed some 30-40 miles well inland. These reserve divisions, 44th (Home Counties) around Doncaster in I Corps and 42nd (E. Lancs.) around Darlington in X Corps, were well trained and battle-experienced, having seen action in France, and though needing all types of heavy equipment, had been made

45. WO 166: op. cit., 1st London Division, July 1940.

mobile, using requisitioned civilian transport, and stood ready to move to take up positions on the coast within three or four hours' notice once the direction of the enemy threat was defined. Routes were earmarked and reconnoitred, and moves practised, while the plentiful open moorland in Northern Command, largely free from civilians and arable farming, provided excellent training grounds. Despite this, it was firmly believed in Northern Command that a greater threat existed not from the sea, which would involve a long and dangerous crossing for the enemy over the North Sea with little chance of subsequent supplies or reinforcements reaching the enemy lodgement, but from the air and, consequently, much training was practised by all the divisions in rounding up parachutists. Even more important, too, was Northern Command's major task of providing substantial reinforcements in the event of an enemy invasion of East Anglia or of Southern England, since it had no less than six divisions at its disposal. Plans and preparations were, therefore, made to rush the experienced troops of Alexander's I Corps, which also included Major General K. A. N. Anderson's 1st (Regular) Division and Major General N. M. S. Irwin's 2nd (Regular) Division, both of which were well trained, if lacking much of their equipment, and which had been to France and Belgium, southwards by lorry convoys to take over the function of IV Corps in G.H.Q. Reserve, should that formation be committed to battle. The heavy equipment of I Corps would follow by road at a slower pace. In the event of this southward move, Holmes's X Corps was to take over the defence of the East Riding and Lincolnshire; though mainly consisting of undertrained, inexperienced, ill-equipped and largely immobile Territorial troops, its ability to undertake this role in July would at the very least have been greatly suspect. There were, moreover, virtually no tanks and very few 2 pdr. anti-tank guns available within the whole of Northern Command, the only armour being the improvised 'Ironsides' and a handful of ancient Yeomanry armoured cars.⁴⁶ All in all, both the local mobile reserves and the larger mobile reserve formations left much to be desired by mid-July.

Finally, everything depended on the two Corps, plus the smaller formations in Southern Command, that comprised the G.E.Q. Reserves. (See Map 8.) These included three of the best trained, equipped and mobile formations in the Country, namely 1st Canadian Division, 43rd (Wessex) Division and 3rd (Regular) Division; the only other divisions which had reached a comparable

46. Interview with General Sir Ronald Forbes Adam, op. cit., 27 Feb. 1980; and WO 166/24: op. cit., Northern Command, July 1940.

state were 52nd (Lowland) and possibly 1st (Regular) Divisions. Britain's only two Armoured Divisions, also in G.H.Q. Reserve were both far from complete. Major General J. C. Tilly's inexperienced 2nd Armoured Division in Northamptonshire still consisted, in mid-July, of only some 178 machine-gun armed light tanks, instead of its proper complement of 213 Cruisers and 108 light tanks, while Major General R. Evans's 1st Armoured Division in Surrey, despite receiving the utmost priority for re-equipping following its losses in France, mustered three depleted brigades of only two under strength regiments each, instead of its normal establishment of two Armoured Brigades, each of three regiments of Cruiser and light tanks. Thus, in mid-July, the latter Division's 3rd Armoured Brigade, consisting of 2 R.T.R. and 5 R.T.R., had about 70 Cruisers of assorted types manned by battle-experienced crews; its 1st Army Tank Brigade (under command) possessed, on 17th July, 27 machine-gun armed Matilda Mk. I's and 23 Matilda Mk. II's with the inexperienced 3 R.T.R., and a further 26 Matilda Mk. II's with the battle-experienced 4 R.T.R.; while its inexperienced 20th Armoured Brigade from East Anglia, which had a motley collection of around 30 light tanks and light 'wheeled' tanks, plus improvised 'Ironside' armoured cars and some lorried infantry, would only really be capable of a reconnaissance role. The Division's Support Group included a number of towed 25 pdr. field guns with 3 R.H.A., but its artillery support was thin and would be split between the three Brigades. The gunners were also handicapped, as were those with the remainder of Home Forces, by a shortage of radio sets. ⁴⁷ The 1st Armoured Reconnaissance Brigade in G.H.Q. Reserve in Huntingdonshire was equipped only with Humberettes and similar improvised light armoured cars of the 'Ironside' type, while the equally inexperienced and semi-trained 21st Army Tank Brigade in G.H.Q. Reserve in Wiltshire still mustered only 16 Matilda Mk. II's.

Thus, lacking large numbers of effective tanks, with relatively few experienced or highly trained tank-crews, with the infantry mainly untrained in close co-operation with tanks, with a shortage of artillery and anti-tank guns still apparent amongst some formations in G.H.Q. Reserve, and with long distances to travel by road or rail - very likely under heavy enemy air attack - to reach the areas of operations, it is clear that the ability of the G.H.Q. Reserves to mount any rapid and powerful counter-offensive against a major German incursion would have been, in mid-July, severely in

47. WO 166: op. cit., 1st Armoured Division, July 1940.

doubt. Indeed, given the state of the G.E.C. Reserves at this time, combined with that of the other elements of General Ironside's plan for the land defence of the Nation, it is very likely that if the Germans had planned and prepared an invasion of Britain to take place in July and had managed to secure a reasonably-sized bridgehead and to reinforce it with tanks, artillery and transport, they would have had little real trouble in advancing to complete the conquest of the remainder of the British Isles.

Nevertheless, progress was being made, and General Ironside was looking to the future with a certain degree of optimism. He wrote in his diary, on 19th July:

"We must begin to get a Home Army organised at once. We cannot use all the Field Army for operations of pure defence in England.

I have started with the principle that we want the following forces:

- (i) A coast defence and its immediate reserves.
- (ii) Striking columns.
- (iii) [Anti-] parachute columns.

We still have an immense amount of work to do to get the coast defences in order, but we are well on the way towards it. When that is finished, we can arrange the local reserves...." 48.

* * *

General Ironside was destined never to be given the chance to put his plans for the future into effect. Instead, he was to be abruptly replaced in the post of Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, and his long and distinguished career was to come to a sudden and dramatic end. The seeds of doubt, as to the abilities of the veteran General, had been sown in the controversial debate that had sprung up in the latter days of June over the nature of his plans for the land defence of the Nation and, though the matter had appeared to be settled, dissatisfaction had in fact lingered on in many quarters, growing rapidly into a lack of confidence in his leadership of Home Forces. General Ironside's own diary gives us hints that all was not well behind the scenes. On 8th July, he had attended a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff, at which he had argued that it was undesirable on military grounds, in the event of an invasion, to fight the battle in

48. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 19 July 1940, op. cit.

person from the small Advanced Headquarters in the Cabinet War Room in Whitehall, where the lack of accommodation would limit the size of his Operational Staff, and that he would remain instead, without being continually called away for conferences and consultations elsewhere, at his main Operational Headquarters at St. Paul's School, Kensington, where a proper Combined Operations Room was being established and which was only ten minutes' distance from Whitehall anyway. Contact between himself and the Government, he suggested, could be maintained by telephone and by means of liaison officers where necessary, while an Advanced Intelligence Headquarters could remain at Whitehall and would duplicate for the information of the Government all the intelligence that came in to the Combined Operations Room at the main Headquarters.⁴⁹ "One didn't want to be continually on tap," he commented in his diary, and then added, somewhat mysteriously:

"Odd people, like Lord Hankey, are continually sending for Paget to interview him about something or other. We should not be at the beck and call of odd people...." 50.

In fact, General Ironside's suggestion, though it met with the Chiefs of Staff's approval, was emphatically rejected by the Prime Minister the next day, who insisted that it was "absolutely essential" that the Commander-in-Chief should be available for consultation with the Chiefs of Staff, War Cabinet and himself at all times, and that the existing arrangements should stand unchanged.⁵¹ General Ironside's problems were to continue. Two days later, he wrote:

"I find a great many fingers in the Home Defence pie. I allow them to work away so long as they do not overstep the mark. It is natural that things should be scrutinised closely, as everybody is in this show...."

Further indications of impending trouble came the following day, 12th July, as General Ironside took dinner with Lady Maureen Stanley. "She confided to me that there was a 'whispering campaign' going on about me," he recalled that evening. "She implored me to be careful in what I said. I told her that I never went out anywhere and never discussed military

49. CAB 79/5 COS(40)211th:1, 8 July 1940.

50. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 8 July 1940, op. cit.

51. CAB 79/5 COS(40)215th:1, 9 July 1940.

matters outside my own staff." Criticism, too, was being voiced by some keen, but ill-informed Members of Parliament, criticism which General Ironside was not permitted to answer. "They ought to know what is going on," he commented on 18th July:

"The soldiers are blamed for crimes that are committed by Government, and I am personally blamed for a great deal that is beyond my control. And yet one is tied absolutely by the veto put upon talking by soldiers." 52.

The military historian, Captain B. H. Liddell Hart, was more specific, however, in his criticism. He wrote, on 16th July:

"Ironside is in better form since he has been out of the War Office and doing a more executive job as Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces. Even so, he is not very good, nor strong." 53.

Related to the question of General Ironside's plans, to a large extent was a further continuing source of disagreement. This was the crucial problem of whereabouts on Britain's long coastline the main German attempt at invasion might fall, in what strength and by what means he might come, and the proportion of Home Forces' formations needed to ensure adequately against the expected threats in the various sectors of coastline. It was still firmly believed in most higher circles that the main enemy invasion attempt would be against the East Coast. The enemy activity observed in Norway and to a lesser extent in the North German and Baltic ports and in the Low Countries, compared with the paucity of evidence in the Channel ports or Western France, and bearing in mind the difficulties envisaged for the enemy in the passage of the Dover Straits, all seemed, in July, to point to the East Coast as being the most likely area and especially that between The Wash and Dungeness. General Ironside, despite reinforcing both the South Coast and Scotland to some extent, was amongst the many who favoured the official view as held by the War Office. "The main landings in this Country," he wrote, on 4th July,

".... will undoubtedly be carried on in Kent and East Anglia. All other operations, which may be landings in the Shetlands, Yorkshire, the South Coast, Devon and Cornwall, and Ireland, will be diversions to get us to move away our main reserves." 54.

52. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 11, 12 & 18 July 1940, op. cit.

53. Liddell Hart Papers: 11/1940/72, Notes for History, 16 July 1940.

54. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 4 July 1940, op. cit.

Winston Churchill at first shared this view, though with much scepticism as to the real possibilities open to the invader. At a War Cabinet meeting on 9th July, he declared that, in view of the lack of enemy shipping seen in the Channel ports, he "did not think that in the immediate future, at any rate, there was much possibility of an attack being launched from the French Coast." Next day, he minuted to General Ironside, General Dill and Major General Ismay:

"I find it very difficult to visualise the kind of invasion all along the coast by troops carried in small craft, and even in boats. I have not seen any serious evidence of large masses of this class of craft being assembled, and, except in very narrow waters, it would be a most hazardous and even suicidal operation to commit a large army to the accidents of the sea in the teeth of our very numerous armed patrolling forces.... A surprise crossing should be impossible, and in the broader parts of the North Sea, the invaders should be easy prey, as part of their voyage would be made by daylight it will be very difficult for the enemy to place large well-equipped bodies of troops on the East Coast of England whether in formed bodies or flung piecemeal on the beaches as they get across....

Even more unlikely it is that the South Coast would be attacked. We know that no great mass of shipping exists in the French ports, and that the numbers of small boats there are not great. The Dover barrage is being replenished and extended [the Admiralty] do not think any important vessels, warships or transports have come through the Straits of Dover. Therefore I find it difficult to believe that the South Coast is in serious danger at the present time. Of course a small raid might be made upon Ireland from Brest. But this also would be dangerous to the raiders while at sea."

"The main danger," the Prime Minister asserted, "is from the Dutch and German harbours, which bear principally upon the coast from Dover to The Wash." 55.

Winston Churchill concluded his minute by again urging the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, to modify his largely static and defensive plans as quickly as possible. Placing great emphasis on his favourite point, he wrote:

"I hope, therefore, relying on the above reasoning, that you will be able to bring an ever larger proportion of your formed Divisions back from the coast into support or reserve so that their training may proceed in the highest forms of offensive warfare and counter-attack and that the coast, as it becomes fortified, will be increasingly confided to troops other than those of the formed Divisions, and also to the Home Guard. I am sure you will be in agreement with this view in principle, and the only question open would be the speed of the transformation. Here too, I hope we shall be agreed that the utmost speed shall rule." 56.

55. CAB 66/9 WP(40)264; also COS(40)550, Annex I: Invasion, Minute by the Prime Minister to C.-in-C., Home Forces, C.I.G.S. and General Ismay, 10 July 1940.

56. *ibid.*

The harassed General Ironside, who had already suffered the Prime Minister's 'go-getter humours' on this and similar issues several times before, and would indeed have liked nothing better than the means to comply with such a request, commented wearily at this time:

"I have so many factors to take into account:

- (i) The state of the beach defences.
- (ii) The state of the training of the troops in reserve.
- (iii) The state of the mobility of these troops.
- (iv) The availability of some troops for beach defences.

A vicious circle. To use troops in training for beach defence stops their training. This prejudices the future." 57.

The Admiralty supported the War Office view that it was the East Coast rather than the South Coast that was the more liable to enemy attack. On 12th July, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, the First Sea Lord, sent the Prime Minister a detailed and closely reasoned paper which had been drawn up by himself and his staff. In calm and misty weather, the Naval Staff concluded, ".... it appears probable that a total of some 100,000 men might reach these shores without being intercepted by naval forces." The First Sea Lord divided this maximum total as to both the enemy ports of departure and the points of landing. Up to 62,000, it was believed, might be directed against the East Coast from Belgian, Dutch and German ports, with another 10,000 being sent against the Shetlands, Iceland and the Scottish Coast from the Norwegian ports. Only 25,000 men, however, were expected to reach the South Coast, of which most would depart from the Bay of Biscay ports and a mere 5,000 from the Channel ports, because in the latter case, "Our air reconnaissance of these harbours is good, and their nature and layout is such that the enemy could not hope to conceal preparations for an invasion on any scale, whether in big ships or small craft." Nevertheless, like Churchill, the Admiralty were somewhat sceptical as to the invaders' real chances:

"These men would no doubt be sufficiently equipped to keep them going for some days, and possibly weeks, but the maintenance of their line of supply, unless the German Air Force had overcome both our Air Force and our Navy, seems practically impossible.

It must be assumed, therefore, that if the enemy undertook this operation under these conditions, he would do so in the hope that he could make

57. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 9 July 1940, op. cit.

a quick rush on London, living on the country as he went, and force our Government to capitulate." 58.

The Prime Minister, satisfied with the Admiralty's estimate, and considering that, because the enemy could not bring heavy weapons with them and would rapidly have their lines of communication to any lodgements severed, "the invading strength seemed even in July to be well within the capacity of our rapidly improving Army," circulated both the Admiralty's and his own memoranda to the War Cabinet, the Chiefs of Staff and to Home Forces, with a covering note, on 15th July:

"The Chiefs of Staff and Home Defence should consider these papers. The First Sea Lord's Memorandum may be taken as a working basis, although I personally believe that the Admiralty will in fact be better than their word and that the invaders' losses in transit would further reduce the scale of attack, yet the preparations of the land forces should be such as to make assurance doubly sure. Indeed for the land forces the scale of attack might well be doubled, namely 200,000 men distributed as suggested by the First Sea Lord. Our Home Army is already at a strength when it should be able to deal with such an invasion, and its strength is rapidly increasing."

Putting further pressure on General Ironside, he went on to add:

"I should be very glad if our plans to meet invasion on shore could be reviewed on this basis so that the Cabinet may be informed of any modifications."

Winston Churchill then concluded his minute with a statement that was of some significance, since it marked the beginnings of his pressure to give a greater priority to the South Coast:

"It should be borne in mind that, although the heaviest attack would seem likely to fall in the North, yet the sovereign importance of London and the narrowness of the seas in this quarter make the South the theatre where the greatest precautions must be taken." 59.

The very next morning, General Ironside himself being away on a three day tour of Home Forces, the Chiefs of Staff summoned the General's own Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Bernard C. T. Paget, to their meeting for

58. CAB 66/9 WP(40)264; also COS(40)550, Annexe II: Invasion, Memorandum by the First Sea Lord, 12 July 1940.

59. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., p. 256; and CAB 66/9 VP(40)264; also COS(40)550: Home Defence, Minute by the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, 15 July 1940.

questioning on the matters raised in the two papers circulated by the Prime Minister under his covering minute. Explaining the present dispositions of Home Forces to the Chiefs of Staff Committee, however, Paget argued for General Ironside that the request of the Prime Minister in his memoranda to bring back more formations from the coast into support or reserve for training in counter-attack, could simply not be met at the moment, because of the lack of equipment. He emphasized that:

".... while the formations in reserve were 100% mobile, they were not complete in artillery. It would be unsound to withdraw further formations into reserve, and thereby give them a counter-offensive role, until there were sufficient guns available to give them the necessary fire support."

As to the suggestion that the Commander-in-Chief should review his dispositions in the light of the figures given in the First Sea Lord's Memoranda, Paget pointed out that:

".... the defences had already been disposed, as far as resources would permit, to meet a scale of attack of this magnitude. A further redistribution of the resources available would not increase the power of the defence in face of numbers double or treble those given by the Naval Staff, unless a change in the proportion reaching any one part of the coast could be foretold."

Having little choice but to accept Lieutenant-General Paget's explanation of the equipment situation and the dispositions necessitated by this factor, the Chiefs of Staff could only request that General Ironside be asked to examine carefully both of the papers "with a view to making certain that the available troops were disposed to the best advantage."⁶⁰ Hearing of this tame reception to his memoranda, however, the Prime Minister was soon to take further and more drastic action.

The Chiefs of Staff, meanwhile, noting the very great progress that had been made on the beach defences of the East Anglian and South East Coasts during the last month, now began 'looking over their shoulders' to the defence of the West Coast of England, especially in view of the recent deterioration of relations with Eire. On the morning of the previous day, 15th July, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound had raised this question at the Chiefs of Staff Committee meeting and had drawn attention to the fact that the beach defences of the West Coast "were reported to be backward".

60. CAB 79/5 COS(40)224th:1, 16 July 1940.

In actual fact, beach defences in this sector were virtually non-existent at this time, the reason being, as the Committee pointed out, that the 'bottle-neck' in the construction of them was the rate at which preliminary reconnaissance for their siting could be carried out and that, quite rightly, "the East and South Coasts had received priority".⁶¹ At their meeting on 16th July, the Chiefs of Staff also questioned Lieutenant-General Paget as to progress in the construction of beach defences on the South West, West and North West Coasts. Lieutenant-General Paget replied that, although "considerable progress" had been made on the South West Coast, much remained to be done in the Bristol Channel area and on the coast of Wales, while in the North West no beach defences had yet been prepared. He added that now that the beach defences in the East and South were proceeding well, it should be possible to start in earnest on the West Coast beaches, but he pointed out that, besides difficulties concerning local labour shortages, cement supply, wages for the labourers, and the loss of hitherto unaffected recreational amenities for the public, there were in fact "practically no troops available to cover the beach defences on the West Coast". The Chiefs of Staff, nevertheless, thought that troops could always be moved at short notice to man them once they were built, while a German occupation of Ireland would increase the threat. The Committee, therefore, agreed that the Home Defence Executive should be invited to consider the lesser problems including the question of declaring the West Coast a defended area, and instructed that:

".... subject to causing no delay in the construction of beach defences on the East and South Coasts, work on beach defences on the West and North West Coasts should proceed at maximum speed, irrespective of whether troops could be made available to man the defences. Priority should be given to those stretches of the beach most likely to offer favourable opportunities for a landing."

The Chiefs of Staff even went on to discuss the defence requirements of the Isle of Man; while, following the meeting, G.H.Q. Home Forces not only issued orders to Western Command "to proceed forthwith with the beach defences on the West Coast on similar lines to those nearing completion on the East and South Coasts", but also sent proposals to Southern Command for the defence of the Isles of Scilly!⁶²

61. CAB 79/5 COS(40)222nd:5, 15 July 1940.

62. CAB 79/5 COS(40)224th:1, 16 July 1940; and WO 166/1: op. cit., July 1940.

Obviously, all this concern over the West Coast and its islands could only result in an immense dissipation of already meagre resources and, indeed, at a Defence Committee meeting on 19th July, the Chiefs of Staff's instructions were to suffer the wrath of the Prime Minister. "There would," he objected,

"..... clearly be no end to the effort and material which would have to be spent if we were to fortify the entire coast all round. Was it really to be supposed that the enemy could sail an unescorted expedition from the western shores of France some 600 miles, and make a landing, not only in the face of our Naval forces, but in the very jaws of our air defence?"

Admitting, however, that "a landing in Ireland was a different proposition, since the arrival of a small force might create a flare-up among the local population in support", and that, moreover, "the Irish coast would be easier to reach", the Prime Minister went on to insist that the West Coast should depend for its safety "on our Naval and Air Forces, and on our mobile columns". The idea of laying a minefield at sea between Cornwall and Southern Ireland was also mooted. The Defence Committee, therefore, agreed that no action should be taken on the provision of beach defences for the West Coast until the Chiefs of Staff had reconsidered the problem, and the Chiefs of Staff consequently were to moderate their instructions to a recommendation, on 22nd July, that "defences should be provided on all vulnerable beaches in the vicinity of important ports", priority being given to beaches immediately on either side of any West Coast port where desperate enemy landings might be made "in order to pinch it out".⁶³

Despite the attention given to the West Coast, the Chiefs of Staff held with the prevailing view that the main enemy seaborne invasion would land on the East Coast. In an updated appreciation by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee of the likely scales of attack which were discussed by the Chiefs of Staff on 17th July, for example, the Chiefs of Staff agreed with the J.I.C.'s conclusions that:

"It is considered that the main seaborne invasion is most likely to be made between The Wash and Newhaven, and the areas most likely for beach landings are in the region of Southwold and in East Kent."

63. CAB 69/1 DO(40)20th:1, 19 July 1940; and CAB 79/5 COS(40)229th:2, 22 July 1940.

Simultaneous landings, it was expected, might occur in both areas "with the object of a pincer movement on London", the capital naturally being regarded as "the principal enemy objective", though the industrial Midlands and North could not be ruled out as "other possible objectives" and subsidiary landings might occur almost anywhere. The remainder of the J.I.C.'s appreciation - an assault by up to 15,000 parachutists and airborne troops landing in a single day in East Anglia or Kent, followed by five divisions landing in the first wave by sea, the whole supported by massive air action, limited naval action, sabotage and various diversions - was similar to the two appreciations made by the Directors of Intelligence during the previous month, though the J.I.C. now added on an ominous note that:

"Germany could make available from Norwegian, Dutch, Belgian and possibly French sources, light craft with a carrying capacity of from 15 to 20 divisions with the necessary equipment." 64.

With so little evidence actually visible to British reconnaissance at this early stage and a paucity of information emitting from the Continent, it was hardly surprising that there was so much discussion and debate among the politicians and the higher levels of the British command system as to the nature of the invasion and the area to be attacked, while, unbeknown to the British, positive orders from Hitler for serious invasion preparations to begin were only given on 16th July. Even when the latter order did become known, at least within a very limited circle, it was still to be more than another month before the debate would subside.

Meanwhile, the most vocal opponent of the Whitehall view, that the main enemy invasion would be launched against the East Coast, was Lieutenant-General Sir Alan Brooke, then G.O. C.-in-C. of Southern Command. He was equally disenchanted, too, with General Ironside's view that the still appalling equipment situation prevented the withdrawal of further formations into the mobile reserves for intensive training in a counter-attacking role, and with the Commander-in-Chief's plans for a strong coastal 'crust' backed by successive lengthy linear 'stoplines'. To Lt.-Gen. Sir Alan Brooke, fresh from his recent experiences of the Allied debacle in the face of the new German 'Blitzkrieg' tactics on the Western Front, General Ironside's thinking seemed little short of disastrous. Comparatively isolated at his

64. CAB 79/5 COS(40)225th:1, 17 July 1940; and CAB 80/15 COS(40)551 (JIC); also JIC(40)163: Seaborne and Airborne Attack on the British Isles: Scales of Attack, Report by J.I.C., 16 July 1940.

Wilton H.Q., however, from decision making in London, Lt.-Gen. Sir Alan Brooke had hitherto had little opportunity to make his views heard. Then, on 17th July, the same day as the Chiefs of Staff were discussing the J.I.C.'s latest report and only a day after the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, had inspected Southern Command, there came a heaven-sent opportunity for Lt.-Gen. Sir Alan Brooke to air his views as the Prime Minister himself paid a visit to his Command. Collecting Churchill after lunch from Gosport, they attended first an exercise, then drove on a tour of inspection along the Hampshire and Dorset coasts, finishing up near Wool in the evening. The two men straightaway established an excellent relationship with each other. "He was in wonderful spirits and full of offensive plans for next summer," Lt.-Gen. Sir Alan Brooke wrote of Churchill in his diary that evening. "We had a long talk together, mostly about old days and his contacts with my two brothers of whom he was very fond." ⁶⁵ They also discussed the present predicaments of Home Forces, and Lt.-Gen. Sir Alan Brooke did not hesitate to give his candid opinions. Churchill later recalled:

"All the afternoon I drove with General Brooke, who commanded this front. His record stood high. Not only had he fought the decisive flank-battle near Ypres during the retirement to Dunkirk, but he had acquitted himself with singular firmness and dexterity, in circumstances of unimaginable difficulty and confusion, when in command of the new forces we had sent to France during the first three weeks of June.... We were four hours together in the motor-car on this July afternoon, 1940, and we seemed to be in agreement on the methods of Home Defence." ⁶⁶

The Prime Minister's visit was to prove of great significance, not only for Home Forces, but for British military decision making at the highest levels throughout the remainder of the war. The Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden, had already proposed that Lt.-Gen. Sir Alan Brooke should replace General Ironside in command of Home Forces. Now, following his visit to Southern Command, Churchill gave his full support to this proposal, and two days later the War Cabinet, meeting at 12.30 p.m., expressed their agreement to the change. ⁶⁷ A message, calling Lt.-Gen. Sir Alan Brooke immediately to London to see the Secretary of State, was at once sent out from the War Office and reached the G.C. C.-in-C., Southern Command, as he was eating a sandwich lunch with his staff and Lt.-Gen. Auchinleck on the

65. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 17 July 1940.

66. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., pp. 233-234.

67. CAB 65/8 WM(40)208th:3, 19 July 1940.

southernmost beach of the Isle of Wight, where they had been inspecting defences. Hastily finishing his meal, Lt.-Gen. Sir Alan Brooke set off immediately and, travelling mostly by car, reached the War Office at 7 p.m.; a few minutes later he was summoned to Anthony Eden's room where, he recalled:

"I was shown in and informed that I was to take over command of the Home Forces destined to meet the impending invasion at once. 'Tiny' Ironside was to be created a Field Marshal, given a peerage and retired, and Gort was to be made Inspector of Training." 68.

General Ironside had already seen the Secretary of State at 2.45 p.m. on this same day of 19th July, to learn of his retirement. Eden had informed him that he was to be replaced as Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, by Lt.-Gen. Sir Alan Brooke, because "the Cabinet wished to have someone with later experience of the War", and that he was to be made a Field Marshal "in order that the matter should be placed on a good footing". In view of the recent criticism of his planning and preparations, the almost daily expectation of active operations, and the excellent reputation and fighting record of Lt.-Gen. Sir Alan Brooke, General Ironside had been half-expecting a change of this nature to be made. Concealing his obvious disappointment, however, he maintained a calm and unruffled exterior. "I told Eden that he needn't worry and that I was quite prepared to be released," he afterwards recalled. "I had done my best." "And so my military career comes to an end in the middle of a great war," wrote General Ironside philosophically in his diary that evening:

"I have had 41 years and one month's service, and I have reached the very top. I can't complain. Cabinets have to make decisions in times of stress. I don't suppose that Winston liked doing it, for he is always loyal to his friends." 69.

In his memoirs, Winston Churchill, indeed, recalls charitably of General Ironside, who as Commander-in-Chief had always to labour to form his plans and correctly dispose his all too inadequately trained and equipped formations at a time when the predicament of the British Army and of the Country as a whole had never been so desperate, that he accepted his retirement with "the soldierly dignity which on all occasions characterised his actions." 70.

68. Bryant, Arthur: The Turn of the Tide, 1939-1943, p. 195, Collins, London, 1957.

69. Diaries of Field Marshal Lord Ironside, 19 July 1940, op. cit.

70. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., p. 234.

PART III: THE BROOKE PERIOD: 20th July 1940 - 25th December 1941

CHAPTER 9: A FRESH HAND ON THE HELM

Sir Alan Francis Brooke, now promoted to a full General, appeared to be an excellent choice for the vitally important post of Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, at this critical time. At almost 57, he was three years younger than General Ironside. Always immaculate in appearance, punctual and methodical, General Brooke was a highly professional soldier who had earned a first-class reputation even before the War. A determined Ulsterman, he had begun his military career as an artillery subaltern in 1902, after training at Woolwich. He had served with distinction throughout the First World War, rising to the rank of brevet Lieutenant-Colonel. Marked for higher command, he soon rose to become an instructor at the Staff College, Camberley, and in 1927 studied at the newly-created Imperial Defence College, which was set up to instruct promising officers in the techniques of inter-Service co-operation and the higher direction of war. His keen interest in new technical developments, the use of which he frequently pressed upon his often conservatively-minded seniors, led him in the 1930's to a succession of important appointments that gave him a tremendous variety of experience. Becoming in 1939, for a short while, G.O. C.-in-C. Southern Command, he was sent to France soon after the outbreak of war as Commander of II Corps, part of the first contingent of the B.E.F., a formation which he transformed during the winter of 1939 from an inadequately trained unit into a highly efficient and effective instrument of war.

General Brooke's most outstanding achievement was undoubtedly his excellent conduct of the vital east flank battle during the retreat of the B.E.F. to Dunkirk late in May 1940. By skill, speed and foresight, he managed to ward off the attacks of the 17 German Divisions released by the Belgian surrender along a long and exposed flank and successfully to cover the retreat of the flower of the British Army to the evacuation lines which Lord Gort had thrown up in the marshes around Dunkirk. It was an achievement that prompted Sir James Grigg, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for War, to comment:

"By almost universal testimony, it was due largely to his skill and resolution that, not only his own Corps, but the whole B.E.F. escaped destruction on the retreat." ¹.

Captain B. H. Liddell Hart wrote, soon afterwards, that "there is general agreement that Brooke proved the best of the Corps commanders", while

1. Bryant, Arthur: The Turn of the Tide, 1939-1943, p. 16, Collins, London, 1957.

Churchill recorded that "General Brooke and his II Corps fought a magnificent battle".² Within days of his return, he was told to form a new B.E.F., he was knighted and once more he departed for the Continent. Instructed to help save a disintegrating France, however, he quickly found this daunting task impossible to achieve. The battle in Western France was already lost and he stayed only long enough to arrange for the successful evacuation of the 136,000 British troops still on French soil. On his return again to England and after six days' rest at his Hampshire home, he took up his old appointment once more as G.O. C.-in-C. Southern Command on 26th June, remaining at this post until he took over as Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, on 20th July.

His almost unrivalled variety of experience, including that of recent modern warfare, and his character made him the obvious candidate to succeed as C.-in-C., Home Forces. General Brooke was an intellectual soldier, with a keen and penetrating, analytical mind. Having the ability to absorb and marshal facts and figures quickly and with ease, he could present his case at meetings clearly and without the use of notes, while in argument he was soon to prove that he could be as formidable as Churchill himself, not giving an inch on principles whatever the pressure. Throughout the retreat to Dunkirk he had shown that he could keep his head in a crisis and though his short performance in Western France received some criticism, especially in the loss of vehicles and equipment during the over-hasty embarkations, this did not detract from his already high reputation in view of the large number of troops and guns that had been saved. One of his contemporaries, Lt.-Gen. Sir William Pike, then on the staff of III Corps in Western Command, described him as "the greatest of our generals. An extremely good field commander. Very tough irascible and irritated by inefficiency, but entertaining to talk to brilliant." While General Sir Ronald Adam, then G.O. C.-in-C. Northern Command, recalled that General Brooke was "a philosophical man likable and very able." Affectionately known as 'Brookie' by his small number of intimates, he was, however, feared and respected by many of his subordinate commanders rather than loved, due to his impatience and even ferocity at times. Nevertheless, he ejected dynamism and inspired confidence in all he met and his appointment as C.-in-C. was welcomed in all quarters.³ Maj.Gen. H. Pownall, Inspector General to the L.D.V., wrote in his diary on 20th July:

2. Liddell Hart Papers: 11/1940/72, Notes for History, 16 July 1940; and Churchill, W. S.: Vol. II, Their Finest Hour, p. 84, Cassell, London, 1949.

3. Interviews with Lt.-Gen. Sir William G. H. Pike, 18 Aug. 1981, and with General Sir Ronald Forbes Adam, 27 Feb. 1980; and talk by General Sir David Fraser on Alanbrooke as C.I.G.S., 17 Feb. 1981.

"Yesterday came news of Ironside's final succession, an event that has been waited for too long.... I look on Brooke's appointment as G.O.C. Home Forces as excellent, and it would have been a mistake to put Gort there. The latter is a fighting soldier par excellence, but he would have no scope for his talent at Home Forces. There is a fearsome problem of organisation, which is a flair of Brooke's but certainly not of Gort's." 4.

Inwardly, however, General Brooke was a deeply sensitive and emotional man. His diaries, which he wrote each day for his wife, contain many entries that were extreme, temperamental or unfair, but they provided an ideal emotional outlet for the tremendous pressures he often had to endure by day, whether as a commander in the field in France, as C.-in-C., Home Forces, or later as C.I.G.S.. He had no illusions as to the immense importance of the new appointment he was now assuming at this crucial time, not only for Great Britain and her Empire, but for the entire free World, and he realized only too well the dangers to be faced - the probability of an invasion attempt in the very near future, the unpreparedness of Britain's defences, the appalling lack of equipment, the deficiency of training and battle-worthiness in most formations in Home Forces and, above all, the disastrous consequences if he failed at his job. Following his interview with Anthony Eden on the evening of 19th July, General Brooke confided to his wife in his diary:

"I find it very hard to realize fully the responsibility that I am assuming. I only pray to God that I may be capable of carrying out the job. The idea of failure at this stage of the war is too ghastly to contemplate. I know that you will be with me in praying to God that he may give me the necessary strength and guidance." 5.

Unbeknown to General Brooke as he wrote these words, there came a fresh development the same evening that seemed to confirm that the decision to appoint him as C.-in-C., Home Forces, had been the correct one, especially bearing in mind his belief that an invasion attempt in some form or other would almost certainly be made, that it would be directed against the South Coast rather than the East, and that the lessons of recent events on the Western Front decreed that the emphasis of the defence on land should be on plentiful and highly-trained, motivated and equipped mobile reserves rather than on an outdated system of static linear defences. Later in the evening and only a few hours after Hitler had concluded his so-called 'peace offer' speech in the Kroll Opera House in Berlin, the Prime Minister was handed a top secret message that had been rushed from the 'Ultra' decoding unit at

4. Diaries of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry R. Pownall, 20 July 1940.

5. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 19 July 1940.

Bletchley Park where the British, having succeeded in breaking the German ciphering machine 'Enigma', had been monitoring enemy radio signals for some months. Group Captain F. W. Winterbotham, then Chief of the Air Department of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), described what had happened:

"In the middle of July, Ultra produced the signal we had all been waiting for. It had evidently been delivered in great secrecy from Hitler's H.Q. to the Army, Navy and Air Force C.-in-C.'s. Goering, however, then put the gist of it on the air to the generals commanding his air fleets. In his signal he stated that, despite her hopeless military situation, England showed no signs of willingness to make peace. Hitler had therefore decided to prepare and, if necessary, to carry out a landing operation against her. The operation was to be called 'Sea Lion'." ⁶.

This signal provided the first real evidence of the German intention to invade and though Churchill himself was at first reluctant to accept the validity of the evidence, having to be persuaded by the experts who pointed out that the same source, Ultra, had produced the clinching signal about the German Knickebein system of guiding bombers to their targets, the question was henceforth not whether the Germans would invade, but when they would come. ⁷. This opinion was already held by General Brooke. Moreover, although completely unknown to the British at this time, the signal was in fact derived directly from Hitler's famous Directive No. 16, issued on 16th July, which, after stressing the necessity of first achieving air superiority and securing the flanks of the invasion corridor by means of minefields, coastal artillery, diversions, airpower and torpedo sea attacks, went on to confirm officially General Brooke's opinion that, not only was the German Blitzkrieg likely to be as devastating and well-planned as it had been in France, but that the onslaught would be launched against the South Coast, not the East. Directive No. 16 stated:

"The landing will be carried out as a surprise crossing on a broad front from the neighbourhood of Ramsgate to the area of the west of the Isle of Wight; some air force units will play the role of artillery.... Preparations for the entire operation must be completed by the middle of August." ⁸.

It appeared that General Brooke would be put to the acid test all too soon.

* * *

6. Winterbotham, F. W.: The Ultra Secret, p. 41, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1974.

7. Lewin, Ronald: Ultra Goes to War: The Secret Story, p. 91, Hutchinson, London, 1978.

8. Trevor-Roper, H. R. (ed.): Hitler's War Directives, 1939-1945, pp. 74-78, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1964.

General Brooke immediately began the task of familiarising himself with Britain's land defences. On arriving at his new Headquarters at St. Paul's School, Hammersmith, in the afternoon of the following day, 20th July, in a rather unwelcome blaze of publicity engineered by the Ministry of Information, he discovered that General Ironside had already left, even taking his furniture with him. Nevertheless, General Brooke was very soon able to meet the staff of G.H.Q., Home Forces, and make their acquaintance. Of these the most helpful was undoubtedly Major General Bernard Paget, who had so recently been General Ironside's Chief of Staff and who was now to become General Brooke's own right-hand man. Paget lost no time in briefing his new superior. General Brooke recalled of Paget that he:

".... was thoroughly familiar with all dispositions and able to put me in the picture. I could not have wished for a more helpful and loyal Chief of Staff, and am deeply grateful to him for the efficient way in which he ran the Headquarters." 9.

To familiarise himself with the overall land defences of the nation and with a view to implementing the changes that had already begun to form in his mind, General Brooke took every opportunity over the next few weeks, and almost any means of transport available, to visit as many formations and units as possible of his new command. He later wrote:

"I set my programme of tours so as to cover the whole of the coastline first, getting a picture in my mind of the main danger points, examining the defences, visiting units and, above all, meeting commanders of corps, divisions and brigades. I was soon able to decide what changes were necessary in the command of formations." 10.

Thus, believing that not a moment was to be lost if the defenders were to cope successfully with the speed and destruction that could be wrought by even a small armoured attack and beginning with the most vulnerable sectors, he impatiently commenced by spending the morning of 22nd July with Lieutenant-General Sir Guy Williams at Eastern Command Headquarters. Early next day he flew to York to meet Lieutenant-General Sir Ronald Adam and his two Corps Commanders, Holmes and Alexander, for a discussion on the organisation of the defences of Northern Command and an inspection of beach defences between Scarborough and Bridlington. The following day he flew, again from Hendon,

9. Bryant, Arthur: op. cit., p. 197.

10. Autobiographical Notes of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke; and Bryant, Arthur: op. cit., p. 200.

to Chester for an inspection of General Sir Robert Gordon-Finlayson's Western Command, during which he not only discussed the defences of the Liverpool-Birkenhead area and flew in another 'plane to inspect possible landing-grounds on the Lancashire coast as far north as Preston, but also motored out to Lieutenant-General Sir James Marshal-Cornwall's III Corps H.Q. at Whitchurch in Shropshire. Three days later, 27th July, found General Brooke on the night-mail train to Edinburgh where he breakfasted with Lieutenant-General Sir Robert Carrington, G.O. C.-in-C. Scottish Command, met the divisional commanders and inspected their formations, and returned to London by train that night. On 30th July, General Brooke, continued his whirlwind tours with a flight to The Wash to inspect 52nd (Lowland) Division and 18th (East Anglian) Divisions and to meet their commanders. This day, too, he also inspected the beach defences from The Wash to Yarmouth, an inspection he continued on 1st August with a two-day tour of beach defences and formations as far south as Southend. Finally, on 7th August, he embarked on a further two-day tour, this time of Lieutenant-General 'Bulgy' Thorne's XII Corps area. Working round the coast from the Isle of Sheppey to Rye on the first day, he continued next day via Hastings, Eastbourne and Brighton to beyond Shoreham in Sussex, in fact almost up to the boundary of his old Southern Command, of which latter area he naturally already had an intimate knowledge. ¹¹.

Summarising his findings, General Brooke was able to report to the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 5th August that:

"The beach defences along the East and South-East Coasts are well advanced; those along the South Coast as far as Portland were progressing well, but little work had so far been done on the West Coast. The defences in Scotland were not strong, but were more advanced than those in the South-West of England - an area closer to enemy territory. Work had begun on defences in the vicinity of the more important West Coast ports." ¹².

Thus by 9th August, General Brooke had been able to gain a good personal impression of the formations and forward defences along all the most vulnerable coastlines. He was now able to confirm, by his own observations, many of the things that had long been troubling his mind and which he was anxious to change. In fact, he had already begun to implement his own ideas, long before his tour of the coastal areas was complete. One of the first things

11. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 22 July - 8 August, 1940.

12. CAB 79/5: COS(40)247th:1, 5 August 1940.

that General Brooke was determined to change as soon as possible was the seemingly muddled policy which had been allowed to develop under his predecessor, as to the employment of mobile artillery and the few, but gradually increasing numbers of anti-tank guns. "There is considerable divergence between commanders and lower formations in the method of employment of the artillery of the Field Army available for Home defence," wrote General Brooke in G.H.Q. Artillery Operational Instruction No. 3 issued on 31st July, less than two weeks after taking up his new post:

"For example, in certain formations, field and medium artillery is sited in positions with the dual role of carrying out defensive fire tasks by observation on beaches and dealing by direct fire with possible landings in the neighbourhood by parachutists or troop carrying aircraft.

In others, field guns are sited as anti-tank beach defence guns, while in certain cases the majority of the available mobile artillery is held in mobile reserve."

General Brooke also found a similar divergence of policy with regard to the employment of mobile and static anti-tank guns. "In some formations," he continued, "the majority are sited for the defence of the G.H.Q. zone of 'Stops'. In others, almost all available anti-tank guns have been sited for the defence of beaches." ¹³.

This contradictory state of affairs had been allowed to develop unchecked during the six weeks that had passed since General Ironside's G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 3 had emphasized the importance of a linear defence in great depth, laying down that the majority of the available static anti-tank guns were to be sited on the G.H.Q. line with the remainder being used for beach defence, whilst also stressing that those guns with sufficient mobility were to be included in mobile columns. General Ironside's instructions had, of course, been written at a time, 15th June, when the forward defences had been very weak, an attack was daily considered imminent and it was considered desperately necessary that immediate defensive positions should be established to cover London, the industrial heartland and the greater part of England in case even a small hostile landing proved initially successful, as then seemed all too likely. In the haste of the moment, therefore, a situation had unintentionally developed whereby static anti-tank guns were mainly sited for the defence of the rearward zones or 'stops', while the role of static anti-tank defence of the beaches

13. WO 166/1: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, G.H.Q. Home Forces, July 1940, Appendix K: G.H.Q. Artillery Operational Instruction No. 3, 31 July 1940.

was largely being fulfilled by a significant proportion of the potentially mobile field artillery.

General Brooke clearly felt that this state of affairs could not be allowed to continue unchecked any longer. From his series of visits to the coast, he was encouraged by the fact that the beach and other forward defences, especially in the physical obstruction of the beach exits and of the beaches themselves, had by now become much stronger. After his inspection of coastal defences between Scarborough and Bridlington in Northern Commands on 23rd July, he had noted that "a lot of good work has been done there," while following his tour of the East Anglian Coast, too, he noted that the fortification of the beaches was "getting on well", though a few days later, on 7th August, he was to be less satisfied with the defences of East Kent where he found that the "Ramsgate salient still requires more work on sea defences." ¹⁴. Nevertheless, he felt confident enough to write on 31st July:

"During the six weeks since the above Instruction [of 15 June] was issued, a material change has taken place in that our beach and other forward defences have become much stronger. Consequently, there is now every probability of being able to prevent a seaborne attack getting a footing on land. Even should an attack have an initial success, it will certainly be destroyed before it has penetrated far." ¹⁵.

General Brooke's last statement was probably still somewhat over-optimistic at a time that was less than two months after the Dunkirk evacuation. Pessimistic statements in an Operational Instruction, however, would only be harmful to morale. Nevertheless, it was true that significant progress had been made in only a very short space of time. What he saw as a much improved situation then, led General Brooke to issue new instructions as to the deployment of artillery and anti-tank guns. "Field and medium artillery," he ruled, "should be employed as such, making full use of their range, shell power and such mobility as is possible." In this, their proper role, they were "to be employed for the support of infantry either in position with lines laid out and defensive fire tasks allotted, or disposed with alternative reinforcing positions reconnoitred." Only in very exceptional cases, when there were no other weapons available, were field guns permitted to be employed in a purely anti-tank role. Heavy artillery, as of course was always the case due to their lack of mobility, would have to be ready-sited in emplaced or field positions with telephone lines laid out, but,

14. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 23 July - 7 August 1940.

15. WO 166/1: op. cit., July 1940, Appendix K: op. cit., 31 July 1940.

taking advantage of their longer range, would have their defensive fire tasks allocated to likely landing places either by sea or air, rather than to direct support of the infantry. Static anti-tank guns were also to be employed to better advantage. Rather than being spread along the 'stop-lines', often a great way inland from the coast, they were to be sited, wherever possible, in defended localities, either far forward as part of the beach defences, thereby releasing the greatest possible number of potentially mobile guns for more suitable tasks, or concentrated at centres of communication or astride the main avenues of approach inland. Finally, the mobile anti-tank guns thus released were to be employed with the mobile reserves with alternative positions reconnoitred and prepared in rearward zones, though General Brooke realised that due to the lack of static weapons and the need to cover all the most vulnerable beaches with anti-tank fire, "it may be necessary in some cases to employ these weapons in a static role." 16.

These instructions were but the first that General Brooke was to issue as he unhesitatingly began to impose his own ideas concerning the nature of the land defences of the nation. During the very first of his visits, to Eastern Command on 22nd July, he "discovered that much work and energy was being expended on an extensive system of rear defence, comprising an anti-tank ditch and pill-boxes, running roughly parallel to the coast and situated well inland." This was, of course, the still incomplete G.H.Q. line covering London and the Midlands that General Ironside had ordered to be constructed in June, behind which the enemy was to be held until the central G.H.Q. Reserves could be moved up for a counter-attack. General Ironside's conventional approach of a linear defence in great depth, which had already received more than its fair share of criticism over the past few weeks, was now instantly discarded by General Brooke. "This static rear-line," he was later to write,

".... did not fall in with my conception.... To start with, we had not got sufficient forces to man this line, even if we had wanted to do so. To my mind our defence should be of a far more mobile and offensive nature. I visualised a light line of defence along the beaches, to hamper and delay landings to the maximum, and in rear highly mobile forces trained to immediate aggressive action intended to concentrate and attack any landings before they had time to become too well established. I was also relying on heavy air-attacks on the points of landing...." 17.

16. *ibid.*

17. Autobiographical Notes of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke; and Bryant, Arthur: *op. cit.*, pp. 197-198.

General Brooke lost no time in making this policy of swift offence, with the mobile reserves placed well forward near the coast, known to his colleagues. He already knew, too, that in this matter he would enjoy Winston Churchill's wholehearted support and confidence, since his views coincided closely with the more practical side of the Prime Minister's rather romantically named 'Leopards'. On 6 August, he attended a Conference in the Army Council Room at the War Office, at which the C.I.G.S., General Dill, and all the G.O. C.-in-C. Commands were present. "Mobile offensive action," he told them,

".... must be the basis of our defence. The idea of linear defence must be stamped out; what is required to meet the dual threat of seaborne and airborne attack is all-round defence in depth with the maximum number of troops trained and disposed for a rapid counter-offensive.

Armoured formations should be employed in the van of the attack with the object of creating situations which could be exploited by motorised infantry."¹⁸.

General Brooke's policies, however, would still take some considerable time to be implemented fully. There was still a very great deal to be done before the British Army at home could be fully confident of resisting successfully any attempt at invasion. At this important Conference, General Brooke then went on to list "the most serious defects", which he urged, "must be remedied." Despite the motley collection of troop-carrying vehicles obtained from civilian sources, a higher standard of motor mobility was still required, as was a higher standard of foot mobility involving a higher degree of fitness. The General also placed great emphasis on training. "Bolder methods," he advocated, "must be used in training," with less time being spent on individual training and more on training formations at brigade and battalion level. "The middle piece officer," he declared, "was the weak link. His training was all important." All the mobile Brigade Groups must be trained offensively and a higher standard was needed in the use of anti-tank weapons of all types with more demonstrations and practice firing. It was, however, the training of the existing twenty-two infantry divisions (excluding the four currently in G.H.Q. Reserve) that must, General Brooke concluded, receive "the first priority". The advanced training of the new Independent Brigades to be formed, which were intended to be of a lower category, "could not be attempted until the existing field formations were trained." ¹⁹.

18. WO 166/1: op. cit., August, Appendix A: Minutes of a Meeting of G.O. C.-in-C. Commands, 6 August 1940.

19. *ibid.*

The sometimes appalling state of training of the latter formations had indeed already been amply demonstrated to General Brooke during his series of visits to the coastal areas. In Scotland on 27th July, for example, he had found the 46th (N. Midland and W. Riding) Division "in a lamentably backward state of training, barely fit to do platoon training and deficient of officers", while 9th (Scottish) Division, which was in fact broken up and merged into 51st (Highland) Division just a few days later, was "in much the same state" as the 46th Division. Even in East Anglia on 1st & 2nd August, he noted that the 'front-line' 55th (W. Lancs.) Division in Suffolk and the 15th (Scottish) Division in Essex, though essentially good, both required "a great deal more training", while in the Kent salient on 7th Aug. he was displeased enough to record that the still partially trained 1st London Division was in addition wrongly deployed to man a "sandwich of linear defences instead of [disposed for] active counter-offensive." 20. General Brooke had had good cause to report to the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 5th August, the day before the Army Conference, that:

"The general state of training in formations of the field army was backward. Half of the twenty-two divisions had done little collective training as they had been handicapped by lack of equipment, by duties in connection with protection of Vulnerable Points and by continuous work on beach and other defences. Although some of these divisions might be fit to operate in Brigade Groups, they were not yet suitable for employment in a mobile role, as they were completely untrained in motorised movements."

He was able to add, however, that "arrangements for improving facilities and opportunities for the collective training of these backward divisions had already been put in hand," although it was the state of their equipment and vehicles, despite additions, that still remained the most serious hindrance to training. "Four division," General Brooke told the Chiefs of Staff that day, "were almost fully equipped," while "eight more were fairly well equipped." The remainder, though, "were deficient in many important items", while the lack of certain types of transport was particularly affecting training for mobile operations.

"There was a serious deficiency in unit transport, in spite of the fact that all available vehicles of a suitable type had been requisitioned. This type of vehicle was, however, coming forward in fair numbers from the 'trade' and the position would improve. Formations were now well supplied with troop-carrying vehicles of the charabanc type." 21.

20. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 27 July - 7 August 1940.

21. CAB 79/5: COS(40)247th:1, 5 August 1940.

The guarding of Vulnerable Points still remained a serious handicap to training. Despite a great improvement in the Spring as to the numbers of troops, especially those of the Field Army, that were employed in this unproductive, though essential, task, the situation had rapidly worsened again since the Dunkirk evacuation had brought the reality of an invasion much closer and as the number of establishments to be guarded continued to increase. "Headquarters, Home Forces," General Brooke had reported to the Chiefs of Staffs on 5th Aug., "had been swamped with demands for troops to protect Vulnerable Points; aerodromes in particular absorbed large numbers of the sub-units of the Field Army." He hoped that the establishment of a new One Man Committee, working under the direction of the War Office and in close co-operation with the Home Defence Executive, "would go far to relieving Home Forces of this crippling commitment." 22. The full extent of the problem and its consequent effect on training, however, is better revealed in a letter to the War Office written by General Brooke five days later, when he complained:

"At the present time some 41,000 Home Defence troops and 17,000 troops of the Field Army are employed on the guarding of Vulnerable Points in this country.

There are some 375 R.A.F. aerodromes, R.D.F. stations and Fuel Depots for which guards are required, amounting at present to approximately 25,000 troops of which 10,000 are troops of the Field Army.

The Vulnerable Points listed before the War by the Vulnerable Point Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence are being afforded military protection. There are in addition many hundreds of Vulnerable Points (exclusive of aerodromes) in which the defence Services and the civil authorities are interested and for which guards have been provided, and increasingly demands are being made. An additional list of points has been drawn up by the Key Points Intelligence Branch of the Ministry of Home Security, totalling 2,800 points, chiefly factories and railways.

It is clearly impracticable to guard all these points and I hope that Lieutenant-General Barker in his new capacity as Adviser on Vulnerable Points will be able to reduce very materially the numbers at present on the list for guarding a large increase in the number of Home Defence Battalions is necessary and I consider that steps should be taken to find this personnel, even if some form of compulsory service in the higher age groups is required." 23.

Such indeed was the scale of the problem that on 23rd August the War Cabinet agreed to the Prime Minister's suggestion that Lieutenant-General

22. *ibid.*

23. WO 166/1: *op. cit.*, August 1940, Appendix B: C.-in-C.'s Letter to the War Office (Under-Secretary of State), 10 August 1940.

Barker should be made directly responsible to himself in his capacity as Minister of Defence, rather than to the War Office.²⁴ This was clearly a step forward since direct pressure by the Prime Minister could now be brought to bear on the situation; nevertheless, the burden on the Field Army of supplying guards for the rapidly increasing numbers of Vulnerable Points was likely to become an even heavier one, with all its detrimental effects on training.

There was also a further and related problem where the growing number of R.A.F. aerodromes was concerned. This was the question of whether the ground defence at such establishments should be an R.A.F. or an Army responsibility. At the present time they were a joint responsibility, a situation which was likely to lead to considerable local confusion in the event of an enemy attack, especially if the attack were a surprise one by parachute troops. Originally, R.A.F. aerodromes had been guarded only by local guards provided by the Army. With the invasion of Holland, these had been supplemented by further Army troops supplied with a generous proportion of automatic weapons to counter parachutists, but due to the large number of claims for protection against parachutists from other interests and to the demands of the B.E.F., General Kirke had ruled that the comparatively few trained troops available should be employed for maximum efficiency as counter-attack formations, so positioned as to arrive within two or three hours of an alarm. As the invasion threat increased, therefore, the R.A.F. had been left to find their own means of supplementing the local Army troops actually on guard at the aerodromes and this they did by arming some 19,000 airmen with rifles, by organising those R.A.F. personnel solely on local defence duties into bodies called R.A.F. Station Defence Forces and by equipping them with open lorries carrying Brens to enable them to hunt down parachutists landing in the vicinity.²⁵ Then on 12th July General Ironside had laid down in G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 10 that the responsibility for the station defence of an aerodrome, which included the initiation of schemes for defence works and obstructions and the co-ordination, after approval by the local military commander, of the defence of the station, should lie with R.A.F. Station Commanders at the R.A.F. aerodromes. Finally, a joint Report by General Taylor and Air Commodore Sanders (Air Ministry), which had been instigated by General Ironside, recommended that the Army should ideally have single responsibility for the defence of

24. CAB 65/8: WM(40)233rd:2, 23 Aug. 1940.

25. Collier, Basil: History of the Second World War: The Defence of the United Kingdom, p. 143, H.M.S.O., London, 1957; and CAB 79/6: COS(40)281st:1, 27 Aug. 1940.

aerodromes. General Brooke was to have good reason to complain to the Chiefs of Staff on 2 September of "certain difficulties which existed in the command of the ground defence of aerodromes", since a typical R.A.F. aerodrome might have available for defence both R.A.F. and Army forces, plus R.E. personnel and A.D.G.B. detachments, under the command of the R.A.F. Station Commander who was in practice fully occupied with R.A.F. matters, while, in addition, "there was the unavoidable complication of the unit which was allotted for counter-attack purposes, belonging to a field formation." ²⁶. A meeting on the following day, 3rd September, between representatives of the War Office, the Air Ministry and Home Forces was expected to resolve the problem, but beyond recommending that an experienced Army officer should be appointed as a Permanent Local Defence Commander and Defence Adviser to the Station Commander at each station, left the vital question of whether the provision of guards should be an Army or an R.A.F. commitment still open to further discussions. Though in the meantime the Army had already begun raising, organising and training 60,000 young soldiers specifically for the purpose of guarding all aerodromes, with greatest emphasis naturally on protecting R.A.F. Fighter Stations in the vulnerable South East, the system of divided responsibility was to remain unresolved until the end of November, well after the immediate threat of invasion had passed, when the Chiefs of Staff finally approved an agreement between the Army and the Air Council that the provision of personnel for the local defence of aerodromes should be, at least "in principle", an Army commitment. ²⁷.

The problems concerned with guarding Vulnerable Points and aerodromes were not to be the only distractions to Home Forces from the vital task of training. At a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff on 9th Sept., General Brooke was to draw attention to the demands on Home Forces for personnel to be used for such diverse activities as hop-picking and for working the generators required to provide artificial smoke-screens! Again, General Brooke had to remind the Chiefs of Staff that "the training was backward and it was most undesirable that troops should be used for any non-military purposes". Though the use of troops for the former activity was forbidden outright by

26. CAB 79/6: COS(40)290th:1, 2 Sept. 1940.

27. CAB 80/18: COS(40)705: Command of Ground Forces at Aerodromes: Record of a Meeting of the War Office, Air Ministry and Home Forces on Tues. 3 Sept. 1940; & Annexe, 4 Sept. 1940; CAB 79/6: COS(40)298th:3, 6 Sept. 1940; CAB 79/7: COS(40)354th:1, 21 Oct. 1940; CAB 80/23: COS(40)957: Defence of Aerodromes: Report by the Sub-Committee on the Defence of Aerodromes, 20 Nov. 1940; & CAB 79/8: COS(40)409th:1, 29 Nov. 1940.

the Prime Minister, some 5,000 men still had to be found to man the equipment to produce the latter.²⁸ Eventually these were found by the War Office from troops of a low medical category, but by then the 'Blitz' had begun and repeated calls were being made on the troops of Home Forces for assistance in clearing streets of air raid debris, for shoring up buildings and for clearing communications generally in the London area.²⁹ It would seem that there would be no end to the distractions from training for the already overstretched formations of Home Forces.

Despite these extra and unwanted burdens on Home Forces, however, the most serious impediment to training remained simply that of providing the arms, vehicles and other equipment necessary to enable the troops to fight the enemy effectively. Though General Brooke had painted an alarming picture of the state of equipment in the field formations of Home Forces to the Chiefs of Staff on 5th August, there had nevertheless been considerable additions since the desperate days of June, while August was to see further important improvements to the situation. Following the opening of the German offensive on the Western Front, French and British appeals to the United States had resulted in the prompt release by the Americans of a great quantity of arms from their reserves held since the First World War. It had been intended to split these with the French on a 50-50 basis, but on the fall of France all French orders had been made over to Britain. The first convoy of nearly 250,000 rifles and 300 field guns had safely reached British ports on 9th July, their despatch, transport, unloading, reception and distribution being hurried along at every stage by urgent minutes from the Prime Minister. "I have asked the Admiralty to make very special arrangements for bringing in your rifle convoys," he had written to the Secretary of State for War two days beforehand,

".... At least 100,000 ought to reach the troops that very night, or in the small hours of the following morning. Special trains should be used to distribute them and the ammunition according to a plan worked out beforehand exactly, and directed from the landing-port by some high officer thoroughly acquainted with it. It would seem likely that you would emphasise early distribution to the coastal districts, so that all the Home Guard in the danger areas should be the first served."

And next day, he wrote to General Ismay:

28. CAB 79/6: COS(40)302nd:1, 9 Sept. 1940.

29. CAB 79/7: COS(40)329th:1 and COS(40)330th:3, 30 Sept. 1940.

"Have any steps been taken to load the later portions of American ammunition, rifles and guns upon faster ships than was the case last time? What are the ships in which the latest consignments are being packed, and what are their speeds? Will you kindly ascertain this from the Admiralty." 30.

On 17th July there came another valuable addition to Home Forces in the form of the arrival finally of the eight regular British battalions withdrawn from India, while on 31st July a second convoy from America reached Britain with a further 200,000 rifles and more field guns. Churchill wrote later, somewhat optimistically, "By the end of July we were an armed nation, so far as parachute or airborne landings were concerned. We had become a 'hornets' nest'." 31. The rifles, in actual fact, were old Model 1903 Springfield .300 types with only about fifty cartridges apiece. Nevertheless, this well-made and accurate rifle, once thoroughly degreased and painted with a broad red stripe near the muzzle to signify the different ammunition required, was rapidly distributed to arm a large portion of the Home Guard, thus allowing the much needed 300,000 British .303 Lee Enfield rifles already issued to the Home Guard to be, albeit reluctantly, transferred to the growing formations of the Regular Army. Only ten rounds, however, of the American .300 ammunition could safely be issued to the Home Guard and there was no source of manufacture of the American cartridge in Britain. Even so, the American rifles were an invaluable acquisition.

As for the field guns, these proved to be the American produced version of the ancient French 75mm. M 1897 field gun. Though outranged by more modern designs, it was still a viable weapon with a high rate of fire and the Americans had introduced the split trail carriage in place of the original pole trail, and pneumatic tyres for motor traction to replace the original spoked wheels. These guns, moreover, arrived with 1,000 rounds of ammunition apiece, enough for a few weeks' fighting, and though the ammunition was also old and would require re-conditioning, it was good enough for an emergency. Churchill later recalled, glowingly:

30. CAB 65/8: WM(40)199th:6, 10 July 1940; and Churchill, W. S.: op. cit. p. 237.

31. CAB 67/7: WP(40)286: Weekly Résumé No. 47 of the Naval, Military and Air Situation from 12.00 Noon, July 18, to 12 Noon, July 25, 1940, 26 July 1940; and Churchill, W.S.: op. cit., p. 238.

"At the 'seventy-fives' some fastidious experts presently turned their noses up. There were no limbers and no immediate means of procuring more ammunition. Mixed calibres complicate operations. But I would have none of this, and during all 1940 and 1941 these nine hundred 'seventy-fives' were a great addition to our military strength for Home Defence. Arrangements were devised and men were drilled to run them up on planks into lorries for movement. When you are fighting for existence, any cannon is better than no cannon at all, and the French 'seventy-five', although out-dated by the British 25 pounder and the German field-gun howitzer, was still a splendid weapon." 32.

Further convoys of arms were to reach Britain from America during August and by the end of the month the total of Springfield rifles sent over had reached 535,000, with a further 200,000-250,000 under negotiation. Some 820 75mm. M 1897 field guns had by then arrived, together with 20,000 ground and 2,600 tank machine-guns and some 60,000 Thompson sub-machine guns or 'tommy guns' as they were known to the troops. A large number of these weapons had already been issued to the troops, though the different calibres and limited ammunition of the small arms meant these could only be issued to the Home Guard or to fixed defensive points, though the Thompsons at first mainly went to the newly formed Commando Units. 33. Moreover, on 19th August the War Cabinet were told that discussions with President Roosevelt had resulted in an agreement with the Americans to supply the first of an eventual 50 old American destroyers, beginning in a few days, while it was also hoped that 20 motor torpedo boats, 10 large flying boats and 150-200 aircraft might also soon be procured. 34.

From the arms factories in Britain, too, a steady and slowly increasing flow of modern arms of all types was reaching the troops. Non-stop production throughout June, July and August had, despite the priority given to the defence of Britain against the accelerating German aerial attack, managed to bring about an impressive improvement in the weaponry and equipment of Home Forces. "Since the beginning of June," Herbert Morrison, the Minister of Supply, wrote encouragingly in a report drafted in the middle of August, "the supply of arms for the Army, which was desperately low two months ago, has greatly improved. Today," he went on, "the Army is much better supplied, though its steel clothing is a somewhat patchwork affair."

32. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., p. 238.

33. CAB 66/11: WP(40)339: The Munitions Situation: Memorandum by the Minister of Supply, 29 Aug. 1940.

34. CAB 65/8: WM(40)230th:8, 19 August 1940.

The number of field guns in the hands of the troops in Britain had increased from about 600 (110 18 pdrs., 195 4.5" and 295 25 pdrs. & 13/25 pdrs.) (See Appendix 6.), at the beginning of June, or only 20% of establishment, to over 1,600 or 52% of the initial equipment required by all the infantry and armoured formations, and Corps and Army troops in the country (including the formations' ordnance stores), by early August. This addition of about 1,000 field guns in only ten weeks was no mean achievement, though only just over half of these, 275 new 25 pdrs. and 250 converted 18/25 pdrs. in June and July, were supplied from the factories, the remaining 475 guns being made up of some 280 repaired 4.5" howitzers and 65 repaired 18 pdr. field guns dating from the First World War, and about 130 more field guns, mostly 18/25 pdrs., returned from Western France later in June. To this grand total of 175 18 pdrs., 475 4.5" howitzers and 950 25 pdr. and 18/25 pdrs. by early August, would be a further 122 new 25 pdrs. and perhaps 50 more converted 18/25 pdr. field guns produced during the month, while the issue of the 820 old 75 mm. M 1897 field guns due from America by the end of August, should they all prove to be in good condition, was expected to bring the formations of Home Forces to over 80% of their initial establishment. ^{35.}

The ammunition supply situation for these field guns had, the Minister reported, also undergone considerable improvement. In most cases there was enough ammunition now for a few weeks fighting, by early August, with 1,300 rounds per gun available for the 18 pdrs. and a similar figure available for the 25 pdrs. and 18/25 pdrs., though the 4.5" howitzers had only 312 rounds per gun. In addition there were now over 250 mobile medium and heavy guns with the troops, compared with about 140 in early June, though virtually all of these were refurbished guns surviving from the last War and none were in current production. These were mostly ancient 6" howitzer mediums, newly provided with pneumatic tyres and with about 730 rounds apiece, plus a handful of old 60 pdr. mediums converted to take the 4½" shell and a few 9.2" howitzer heavy guns. Though a limited number of guns, especially 6" howitzers, still remained in the country awaiting refurbishment, no new production of medium or heavy guns for the Army was expected until the following year. ^{36.}

The anti-tank gun position had shown less improvement, the number of 2 pdr. anti-tank guns in the hands of the troops having risen from about

35. CAB 66/11: WP(40)339: The Munitions Situation: Memorandum by the Minister of Supply, 29 August 1940; and CAB 70/2: DC(S)(40)4: The Munitions Situation on 1st June 1940: Memorandum by Director General of Programmes in the Ministry of Supply, 14 June 1940.

36. *ibid.*

120 at the beginning of June, or a mere $4\frac{1}{2}\%$ of the initial establishment, to only 580 or 22% of the initial establishment of Home Forces by the second week in August. Production, which amounted to 202 deliveries during July, was actually to fall during August to about 150 due to a lack of gun carriages, while it was expected that the excess guns would soon be used up by the accelerating tank programme. The small numbers of ex-Naval guns mounted on lorries, moreover, and the very limited anti-tank ability of the ex-American 75 mm. M 1897 field guns, which were in any case primarily designated for an artillery role, did not greatly help matters and the troops, therefore, still largely lacked an effective means to stop enemy tanks. Nevertheless, General Brooke's newly-imposed policy of concentrating all available mobile anti-tank guns with the Reserves was expected to go some way towards at least making the best possible use of the relatively few guns available; the supply of solid shot ammunition, at about 180 rounds per gun, was satisfactory for an anti-tank gun, and the troops now had twice the quantity (over 9,000, or more than 51% of initial establishment) of .55" Boys anti-tank rifles than were available to them in early June, though ammunition for the latter worked out at only 100 rounds per rifle instead of the authorised scale of 340 rounds, which was a serious shortage indeed. ³⁷.

Other weapons, too, were reaching the troops in steadily increasing numbers by the middle of August. The number of Bren light machine-guns with the troops had doubled since early June to about 18,000 or over 53% of initial establishment and most formations now had over half their quota of machine-gun carriers. The output from the factories of Vickers heavy machine-guns and of Mills hand-grenades remained satisfactory, though the troops were still somewhat short of both these weapons. Revolvers were in short supply, though it was hoped partially to relieve this shortage by supplies from America. More serious problems, however, had occurred with the supply of mortars and their ammunition. Stocks with the troops of 2" mortars had risen from about 3,100 on 7th June to only 3,393 on 1st Aug., due to holdups partly caused by the design of a better bomb fuse. Even so, with an ideal establishment of an infantry division standing at 108 x 2" mortars plus a further 15 in base reserve, the stock position was actually exceptionally strong in relation to most other equipment. The production of both the

37. CAB 66/11: WP(40)339: op. cit., 29 August 1940; CAB 70/1: DC(S)(40) 14th:2, 6 August 1940; and CAB 70/2: DC(S)(40)37: Anti-Tank Guns: Report by Minister of Supply, 5 August 1940.

2" mortars and the heavier 3" mortars (stocks of the latter having risen from 261 on 7th June to only 445 on 1st August, working out at less than 50% of an infantry division's initial establishment of 36 x 3" mortars plus three in base reserve) had, in fact, been deliberately reduced for the time being in favour of other urgent work and to allow the production of mortar bombs for both types to catch up, there being, on 1st Aug., a mere 38 H.E. rounds per 2" mortar and 83 H.E. rounds per 3" mortar as against the estimated 515 and 410 respectively needed for two months of fighting. ^{38.}

With the notable exception of anti-tank guns and 3" mortars, therefore, the initial equipment in the hands of the fighting formations had by the second week in August mostly exceeded the halfway mark and in many cases stocks had doubled since early June, though ammunition supplies remained very low in some cases. Virtually the only weapon with which the troops were fully equipped, however, was that most important of personal weapons, the rifle. Even here, however, there were potential problems. In mid-July there were 1,023,000 service rifles (of .303" calibre) in the hands of the troops at home, plus another 75,000 in central and command depots which were largely issued to the recruit intake for the second half of July. A further 65,000 rifles were under repair in mid-July, of which some 40,000 were expected to be issued by the end of August. Since production of new .303" rifles in Britain only amounted to between 2,000 and 3,000 a week from B.S.A., however, until new factories came into production at the end of the year, it was clear that by the middle of August the continuing flow of recruits for the Army at home and to A.D.G.B., making a monthly demand of perhaps around 80,000 rifles, not to mention overseas demands, would absorb all stocks of British rifles. This potentially very serious situation was in fact only averted by the timely arrival of the half million or so American .300" rifles which, together with the 75,000 Ross rifles from Canada, allowed the release of some 300,000 .303" Service rifles from the Home Guard to the Army. As it happened, this release was just enough to see Home Forces into the autumn and safely through the invasion scare of 1940. Supplies, moreover, of .303" ammunition were just as tight, the Defence Committee (Supply) hearing on 6th August that:

"On the accepted basis of a requirement of six million rounds per division per month for active service, the Army had stocks which will last it for only six weeks." ^{39.}

38. CAB 70/2: DC(S)(40)9: Production of 2" and 3" Mortars: Report by Ministry of Supply, 21 June 1940; and CAB 70/2 DC(S)(40)57: *ibid.*, 31 August 1940.

39. CAB 70/1: DC(S)(40)8th:2, 15 July 1940; DC(S)(40)14th:4, 6 August 1940; and CAB 70/2: DC(S)(40)22: Rifles: Statement by the Ministry of Supply, 14 July 1940.

Even here, however, the situation had improved, General Brooke reporting to the Chiefs of Staff on 12th August:

".... small arms ammunition held by units was in no case more than 5% below the authorised scale, but there were no local reserves. Reserves of ammunition were treated in the same way as reserves of fighting troops; that is, they would be available for issue to whatever sector was in danger of running out. The general feeling that there was a shortage of small arms ammunition had been created by the stringent restrictions on the use of small arms ammunition for training purposes. It had been possible recently to increase the training scale very considerably and this should have a reassuring psychological effect on the man in the front line." 40.

Finally, the tank situation of Home Forces had also undergone a considerable improvement by the first half of August. Compared with the 330 light and 'light wheeled' tanks and 74 Infantry tanks actually in the hands of the troops on 10th June, there were on 4th Aug., less than two months later, no less than 395 light and 'light wheeled' tanks, 173 Cruiser tanks and 189 Infantry tanks with the fighting formations of Home Forces, giving a grand total of 757, compared with only 404 with units on 10th June, an increase of 353 tanks. (See Appendices 7 & 10.) By the middle of August the total of tanks with the fighting units was to exceed the 800 mark, double the number available in early June. Priority for issue of these tanks, moreover, had gone to the formations that would be most heavily involved in the counter-attack role if the Germans were to land in force on the coasts of South East England, those of 1st Armoured Division and 1st Army Tank Brigade in G.H.Q. Reserve under the recently formed VII Corps. By early August both these formations were complete in Cruiser and light tanks, and in Infantry tanks respectively, although both formations were at a reduced establishment of two battalions per brigade, and priority had shifted to re-arming 2nd Armoured Division in IV Corps with Cruiser tanks and arming 21st Army Tank Brigade with Infantry tanks, in G.H.Q. Reserve north of London and in Southern Command Reserve respectively. (See Appendix 10 & Map 9.) Herbert Morrison, reporting on the munitions situation in the middle of the month, however, was not over-enthusiastic about the progress of the tank programme and reminded the War Cabinet that the numbers of tanks, artillery and other weapons in Britain were still "trifling" compared with the quantity of arms that Germany now possessed, not to mention the additional weapons she had captured and those of her ally, Italy. He wrote:

40. CAB 79/6: COS(40)260th:2, 12 August 1940.

"The output of light tanks in the past two months has been small in relation to the losses in France, as production of these types has been slowed down. But the output of Cruiser and Infantry tanks has a little more than replaced the losses of these types. The stock at home represents about two thirds of the required establishment of the light variety, but the 400 tanks of the heavier type are a very modest fraction of the War Office Programme." 41.

Despite this and other deficiencies, Herbert Morrison felt able confidently to conclude in his report:

".... taken as a whole, the arming of our troops at home has immensely improved. For this we have to thank the energy which managers and workers alike put into their war stroke when the crisis came in factories throughout the country; the fortunate fact that the orders placed before and at the outbreak of war were beginning to materialise in April and May and could be speeded up; the promptness of the ordnance authorities in finding and refurbishing up all kinds of old equipment; and last, but by no means least, the promptness of the Americans in turning out and shipping a quite substantial armament which had survived from the last war."

Ending on a warning, he added, however:

".... we cannot relax for one moment our effort to bring forward every gun, rifle or round of ammunition that we can lay our hands on during the next few months..... if invasion comes we must, by hook or by crook, prevent Hitler from gaining a sufficient foothold to enable him to turn on the tap of his vast resources." 42.

Herbert Morrison was also to add that "the state of the equipment of our armies in the Middle East must give rise to anxiety." In fact, even before he had finished compiling his report, this last consideration had already dealt a heavy blow to the carefully hoarded strength of Home Forces. General Wavell, facing an imminent invasion of Egypt from the Italian armies massed in Libya, had flown to London to seek urgent reinforcements, especially armour. On 10th August, General Brooke was summoned to a conference with the Secretary of State for War, the C.I.G.S. and General Wavell, and as a result General Dill, with Anthony Eden's ardent approval, wrote to the Prime Minister that the War Office was arranging to send to the Middle East at the earliest possible date a force of over 150 light, Cruiser and Infantry tanks, together with 48 x 2 pdr. anti-tank guns, 20 x Bofors light A.A. guns, 48 x 25 pdr. field guns, 500 Bren guns and 250 anti-tank rifles, plus the necessary ammunition and personnel. Some air reinforcements

41. CAB 66/11: WP(40)339: The Munitions Situation: Memorandum by the Minister of Supply, 29 August 1940.

42. *ibid.*

had already been sent and it was now decided to re-arm with modern aircraft as many squadrons as possible in the Middle East. The Army reinforcements were to start as soon as they could be loaded and, in fact, departed around 21st/22nd Aug., arriving some six weeks later. Churchill received the news from Dill with enthusiasm, even pressing the Admiralty hard, though unsuccessfully, for a direct convoy through the Mediterranean instead of the safer route around the Cape. The chance to fight the Axis power in the Middle East, the only viable field of engagement at this time, appealed strongly to the pugnacious instinct of the Prime Minister, despite the obvious risks of stripping the country of so many precious weapons and trained men at such a critical time. It was an act of high courage, "an intensely brave decision," according to Sir Arthur Bryant. Churchill was characteristically eloquent about it: "No time was lost. The decision to give this blood-transfusion while we braced ourselves to meet a mortal danger was at once awful and right. No one faltered." ⁴³. In fact, General Brooke, still far from confident of his ill-equipped troops' ability to repel invasion and still facing the utmost difficulties in building up his mobile reserves, had serious reservations, both as to the diversion of resources and knowing at the time that the tank reinforcements "constituted a large proportion of the total of my armoured forces." ⁴⁴.

In the event, with the reinforcements arriving in time to enable General O'Connor's Desert Army to win sweeping victories over the superior Italian forces during the winter of 1940-41 and with the failure of the expected invasion of Britain to materialise, General Brooke's reservations were to prove unjustified. Nevertheless, if the flow of information from 'Ultra', the British intelligence unit which was distributing the Enigma deciphered messages from the cryptanalysts at Bletchley Park, is taken into account, then the crucial decision made on 10th August becomes easier to understand.

Ever since the moment in Mid-July when Churchill had finally accepted that the German preparations for invasion, code-named 'Sea Lion', were definitely afoot, the British had begun an intensive surveillance that was

43. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., pp. 378-379; Butler, J. R. M. (ed.): Grand Strategy, Vol. II, September 1939 - June 1941, p. 308, H.M.S.O. London, 1957; and Parkinson, Roger: The Auk: Auchinleck, Victor at Alamein, pp. 165-166, Grenada, London, 1977.

44. Fraser, David: Alanbrooke, p. 186, Collins, London, 1982; and Bryant, Arthur: op. cit., p. 205.

to continue for many anxious months. In this 'Ultra' was to serve throughout as "an indispensable monitor". The relevant signals deciphered at Bletchley during the invasion period, however, came almost entirely from the Luftwaffe, despite the fact that the German plan involved all three services. In his book, 'Ultra Goes to War', Ronald Lewin explains why:

"German naval cyphers remained unbroken until 1941. The German army was notably secure in its use of Enigma and anyway had the land-lines of Western Europe available. But the air force was not only in action, fighting a daily battle: so far as Sea Lion was concerned, the Luftwaffe was involved in every aspect of the operation. As preparations proceeded apace, therefore, an immense amount of signal traffic passed over the Luftwaffe's radio circuits which contained invaluable information not just about the German air force, but about arrangements being made by the army and navy as well." 45.

The Enigma ciphers of the Luftwaffe provided a fertile field for Ultra. It was not to provide vital details on either the quantity of shipping about to be assembled in the Channel ports or on the question of where the Germans were intending to make their landfall, nor did it give invasion dates, yet, by early August, its growing mastery of the Luftwaffe's order of battle had enabled it to assess the scale of the threatened onslaught and to warn that it appeared to be imminent. 46. Already prolific signals from Goering had included orders for his troop-carrying aircraft to practise landing on narrow runways which would simulate roads, while another important signal told of Hitler's order to the German Army and Air Force to co-operate in setting up special terminals at airfields for the quick loading and turn-around of aircraft, so as to air-lift quickly across the Channel not only parachute and air-landing troops, but supplies and arms as well. Then on 1st August, Ultra picked up Goering's significant order to the Luftwaffe "to overcome the British Air Force with all means at its disposal as soon as possible....", while by 8th August the Luftwaffe attacks on shipping and ports, that had commenced as early as 10th July, were indeed becoming noticeably heavier. 47.

By 10th Aug., when the decision was made to reinforce the Middle East from the resources of Home Forces, therefore, it was quite clear to the British Chiefs of Staff from all the evidence that an all-out German air offensive was likely to begin within the next few days. It was also

45. Lewin, Ronald: op. cit., p. 91.

46. Calvocoressi, Peter: Top Secret Ultra, p. 72, Cassell, London, 1980.

47. Winterbotham, F. W.: op. cit., pp. 42-43.

correctly believed that its preliminary aim was likely to be the destruction of the R.A.F., especially Fighter Command, so that the Germans could achieve the air superiority deemed necessary for a successful invasion. Ultra, however, had also revealed significant evidence that all was not well in the German camp. Firstly, it had helped to reveal that the Germans were working to a very tight schedule indeed. Group Captain F. W. Winterbotham of M 16 later wrote:

"From my many secret sources of information it seemed certain that Hitler would attack Russia in the East in the spring of 1941 and if he wanted the 'Sea Lion' affair mopped up in time to redeploy his main forces in the East, he must start his invasion by around mid September at the latest. It didn't give him much time."

Secondly, "there were signals showing disagreement between the Army and the Navy as to how the vast requirements of ships for the seaborne transport was to be met," and thirdly, despite the efforts of aerial and naval reconnaissance, there was as yet no concrete evidence of shipping concentrations in the Channel ports. In spite of the tight timetable, therefore, it appeared from the evidence that there was an apparent lack of urgency which, compared with the feverish efforts of the Luftwaffe to get their vast air fleets up to peak strength and readiness, pointed to a certain reluctance and even lack of commitment by the army and the navy, as well as an obvious inability of the latter two services to co-operate, both with each other and with Goering's Luftwaffe.⁴⁸ The signs were that it would be several weeks more before the preparations of the German army and the navy were fully complete, vital weeks in which the tanks and other weapons now to be taken from Home Forces could be adequately replaced by new production from the factories. Churchill, too, could not have left General Wavell without reinforcements, since the Italian threat to North and East Africa was now severe and "the need to reinforce these battle fronts was hardly less urgent than the need for victory at home."⁴⁹ Moreover, even if the expected German air offensive were to begin on the morrow, it would take a few weeks at least for the Luftwaffe to wear down the fighter strength of the R.A.F. to an extent that a seaborne invasion would be feasible. Winterbotham continues: ".... it was obvious that the main emphasis was still on the operations of the Luftwaffe the air battle was going to be the decisive factor. It

48. *ibid.*

49. Calvocoressi, Peter: *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

was a hopeful sign and I think everyone, including the Prime Minister, felt that, if we could withstand Goering's efforts to eliminate the R.A.F., Hitler would probably give up the idea altogether." 50.

In fact, despite General Brooke's reservations, the reinforcements which departed for the Middle East towards the end of August did not greatly detract from the effective front-line strength of Home Forces in the areas which were most vulnerable of all, in the South-East and East Anglia. The 50 Infantry tanks of 7 R.T.R. had, in fact, been training in Scotland since 13th July and, though formerly part of 1st Army Tank Brigade, their dispatch did not alter the strength of the latter formation in the South-East, which remained at 27 Mk I and 73 Mk II Matilda Infantry tanks. (See Appendices 10 and 11.) The 52 Cruiser tanks of 2 R.T.R. were indeed taken from 1st Armoured Division, but were immediately replaced in the Division's 3rd Armoured Brigade by the fully equipped 3 R.T.R. from War Office control. The 1st Armoured Division was thus kept up to a two battalion strength in Cruiser tanks. Of the front-line formations, therefore, only 20th Armoured Brigade, also under 1st Armoured Division, lost out since its sole light tank regiment was removed about this time, probably to replace 3rd (King's Own) Hussars (52 Vickers light tanks) which was sent overseas from 1st Armoured Brigade in 2nd Armoured Division. By late August, there still remained two fully equipped battalions of Infantry tanks with 1st Army Tank Brigade and two Cruiser battalions plus one 'light wheeled' tank regiment with 1st Armoured Division in G.H.Q. Reserve to the south of London, and no less than six light tank regiments (one re-equipping with Cruisers) in 2nd Armoured Division in G.H.Q. Reserve north of London, a net loss to these important formations of only one regiment of light tanks. Indeed, perhaps a greater loss to the formations in reserve at home was not the tank formations, but the single regiment of 48 invaluable 2 pdr. anti-tank guns, a much more difficult item to replace quickly.

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In the absence of firm evidence pointing to any one area of the British Isles, there still remained the difficult question as to which sector of coast and in what strength the Germans would attack. Although the Chiefs of

50. Winterbotham, F. W.: op. cit., pp. 42-43.

Staff spent a good deal of time in late July and early August discussing the reinforcement of the small garrisons in the Orkney and Shetland Islands, and the threat to these important islands and to the remote North of Scotland by airborne and perhaps even seaborne attack or raids from the German forces in Norway, it was soon realised, quite correctly as it turned out, that the German activity in Norwegian ports and aerodromes was unlikely to be anything more serious than a diversion. The Chiefs of Staff, nevertheless, in view of the importance of the Shetlands as a base for air reconnaissance over Scandinavia and Iceland and for the fighter protection of convoys around the North of Scotland, as well as because of their proximity to Scapa Flow and the virtual impossibility of their reinforcement in the event of a larger attack against Northern Scotland, decided on 9th Aug. to send small reinforcements, including an extra infantry battalion, to the Islands "as a matter of urgency." ⁵¹. General Brooke, too, was informed the same day of the possibility that a maximum of 20,500 German airborne troops might be landed within the space of three days to seize aerodromes in Scotland north of the River Tay, which, combined with heavy air attack on Scapa Flow, might be "an essential preliminary to an invasion of this country", and was asked to consider "whether any re-distribution of his forces was required". ⁵². Such a high scale of attack on such a relatively remote area, in fact, seemed all too real at the time, especially when, as on 13th Aug., he was informed that "the Admiralty had received accurate information that the Germans in Norway had embarked on the night of the 11th and that they expected invasion in the north," General Brooke was receiving such a continuous flow of often wildly exaggerated or totally erroneous rumours and reports through G.H.Q. from all quarters. ⁵³.

A possible German invasion of Ireland still loomed large in the minds of both the Chiefs of Staff and the War Cabinet. Negotiations with the neutral Irish Government, led by Prime Minister Eamon De Valera, had finally broken down on 6th July, and on 19th July Neville Chamberlain had had to report to the War Cabinet that:

51. CAB 79/13: COS(40)258th:2, 9 August 1940; and CAB 79/13: COS(40)264th:1, 14 August 1940.

52. CAB 79/13: COS(40)258th:2, 9 August 1940; and CAB 80/16: COS(40)611(JIC): Possibility of a German Airborne Landing in Northern Scotland with a View to the Neutralising of Fleet Bases in the North as a Preliminary to the Invasion of England, 7 August 1940.

53. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 13 August 1940.

"It was evident that the atmosphere between this country and Eire had greatly deteriorated in recent weeks, mainly on account of suspicions entertained in Eire that we planned to occupy that country by force at an early date." 54.

British refusal to supply arms and munitions to the Irish Army so as to enable it to fight the Germans more effectively and articles in the British press commenting on the folly of Ireland's neutrality had also been contributory factors in adding to the atmosphere of distrust and suspicion now existing between the two countries. Private conversations, nevertheless, continued between De Valera and Britain's representative in Dublin, Sir John Maffey, and these had gone some way to remove the suspicions. According to a letter from Maffey, De Valera had said to him:

"Why will you not trust us? If you think we might attack the North, I say with all emphasis we will never do that. No solution can come by force. There we must now wait and let the solution come with time and patience.

If you think the I.R.A. will get the arms, I can assure you that we have no fifth column today. There is no danger in that quarter.

Give us help with arms and we will fight the Germans as only Irishmen in their own country can fight. There is no doubt on which side my sympathies lie. Nowadays some people joke about my becoming pro-British. The cause I am urging on you is in the best interest of my country and that is what matters most to me." 55.

Sir John Maffey's seemingly favourable response from De Valera persuaded the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Viscount Caldecote, who was worried too that the deterioration in relations might jeopardise the "secret understanding" with the Irish that "in the event of a serious invasion, they will resist the enemy and call upon us for aid," to suggest to the War Cabinet on 22nd July that a public statement he made "to the effect that we had no intention of sending our forces into Eire without a request from their Government", that action should be taken to damp down the press campaign and that a limited amount of military equipment should be supplied to Ireland. 56. The War Cabinet indeed approved the last two suggestions and four days later authorised the Secretary of State to supply to Ireland a very limited amount of military equipment, including some artillery, A.A.

54. CAB 65/8: WM(40)208th:6, 19 July 1940.

55. CAB 66/10: WP(40)274: Relations with Eire: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Annex 1: Letter from Sir John Maffey to the United Kingdom, 17 July 1940.

56. CAB 65/8: WM(40)209th:9, 22 July 1940; and CAB 66/10: WP(40)274: Relations with Eire: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 17 July 1940.

guns, Bren carriers, anti-tank rifles, Bren guns, explosives and the necessary ammunition (actually a very tiny amount, compared with the arms consignment sent to the Middle East in the middle of August), although with reservations since it was felt:

"There was clearly some risk in supplying equipment to Eire and it might well be argued that the best way to induce Eire's co-operation was to withhold all supplies of equipment. Nevertheless, the general view of the War Cabinet was that it was right to take the risk involved." 57.

To Viscount Caldecote's suggestion that a public statement be made as to British military intentions regarding Ireland, however, the War Cabinet had to say no, partly because such a statement might be "liable to a different interpretation", but also because, unknown to Viscount Caldecote until this meeting, the Chiefs of Staff, meeting earlier on this same morning of 22nd July, had in fact discussed the very thing that the statement was intended to deny, namely an immediate occupation by British troops from Ulster of Queenstown, or alternatively Berehaven and the Shannon estuary, for use as a naval base. Fortunately, the Chiefs of Staff had rejected the idea, put forward in an aide-memoire by the Joint Planning Sub-Committee which is closed, significantly, until 1991, on the grounds that:

"Desirable as the possession of a base in South-West Ireland undoubtedly is, the seizure of such a base might well precipitate the hostility of Ireland on a large scale and play into the hands of the Germans. Unless, therefore, we were prepared to occupy the whole of Eire, and to accept the political consequences, it would be inadvisable to establish a base at Queenstown or elsewhere without the co-operation of the Irish." 58.

Other more immediate and pressing problems were to occupy the minds of the Chiefs of Staff during the months of August and September, yet the possibility of an attempted German invasion of Ireland, which remained "only weakly defended by Irish troops", could not be forgotten, in view of the danger that Ireland might be used as a base for air and sea attacks on the vital supply lines to Britain's Western ports or for raids or larger landings on the long and vulnerable West Coast. The Chiefs of

57. CAB 65/8: WM(40)213rd:11, 26 July 1940; and CAB 66/10: WP(40)285: Equipment for Eire: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 25 July 1940.

58. CAB 65/8: WM(40)209th:9, 22 July 1940; and CAB 79/5: COS(40)229th:2, 22 July 1940.

Staff were to report on 4th September in an appreciation of future strategy drawn up for the consideration of the War Cabinet:

"In her present attitude, Eire constitutes a serious liability. Although the Government of Eire would probably call instantly for our help in the event of a German attack on Irish territory, they would undoubtedly resist any attempt on our part to land forces in Eire in advance of a German attack.... At present it is clear that Eire is determined to maintain her neutrality at all costs and will not permit British forces to enter the country, unless the enemy had previously invaded it. In view of the time factor involved, we must retain forces in Northern Ireland and in the United Kingdom ready for immediate entry into Eire at the moment the Eire Government are prepared to permit our entry - both to deny bases to the enemy and to occupy them for our own use." 59.

The military dispositions put into effect during June, therefore, were to stand essentially unchanged during the following three months, although the 3rd (Regular) Division, earmarked to back up the Royal Marine Brigade stationed at Milford Haven, which was to seize a bridgehead in Southern Ireland if it became necessary, had been moved to Bristol from West Sussex as early as 11th July.

Concern about yet another extremity of the British Isles, however, albeit a very minor one, surfaced at a War Cabinet meeting on 30th August, following a small scale air-raid that had created "considerable panic" among the local population. This was the Isles of Scilly, very small and with negligible military value, yet the Prime Minister insisted that the islands "must be held at all costs" and that "all necessary reinforcement of men and materials must rapidly be made available." 60. The Chiefs of Staff, asked to consider their reinforcement, decided in consultation with General Brooke (whose forces had just suffered a considerable reduction in strength due to the dispatch of reinforcements to the Middle East) that "it was better to prevent the enemy landing on the Islands than having to evict them" and, bearing in mind that "political considerations made some reinforcement necessary", they consented to send a second of the new Independent Companies to reinforce the Independent Company already stationed there and currently undergoing Commando training. The War Cabinet, duly reassured, approved this necessarily small reinforcement on 3rd September. 61.

59. CAB 66/11: WP(40)362: Also COS(40)683: Future Strategy: Appreciation by the COS Committee, 4 September 1940.

60. CAB 65/8: WM(40)238th:3, 30 August 1940.

61. CAB 79/6: COS(40)287th:1, 30 August 1940; CAB 79/6: COS(40)290th:1, 2 September 1940; and CAB 65/9: WM(40)240th:3, 3 September 1940.

The focus of attention in late July and indeed through most of August, nevertheless, quite rightly remained on the threat to East Anglia and the South East of England posed by the German military and air force build-up, although the question of which of these two areas would bear the brunt of the expected German assault, in the absence of any concrete evidence of a German naval build-up, at least in the Channel ports, still remained a matter of debate.

The greater weight of opinion in higher circles at this time still favoured East Anglia as being the area where the Germans would launch their main effort, although the security of the South East, with the formation of VII Corps by General Ironside on 19th July, had nevertheless been considerably improved. Churchill later wrote, "It will be noted that my advisors and I deemed the east coast more likely to be attacked during July and August than the south coast." Although Hitler's Directive No. 16 of 16th July had clearly stated that the German invasion would be launched across the Channel against the South Coast and that, in fact, the Germans "never had any hope or intention" of moving an army by sea in large transports from either the Baltic and North Sea ports or from the Biscay ports, none of this precise information was known to the British in 1940, even through Ultra. Churchill stoutly maintained after the War, therefore, that he and his advisors were nevertheless correct. He continued:

"This does not mean that in choosing the south coast as their target they were thinking rightly and we wrongly. The east coast invasion was by far the more formidable if the enemy had had the means to attempt it. There could, of course, be no south coast invasion unless or until the necessary shipping had passed southwards through the Straights of Dover and had been assembled in the French Channel ports. Of this, during July, there was no sign." 62.

Peter Fleming, in his book 'Invasion 1940', comments on the British view, "held with tenacity and abandoned with reluctance", that prevailed at this time:

"Their error was not induced by the cunning of the Germans, whose intermittent attempts to deceive their intended victim were puerile. The fact of the matter was that, until the beginning of September, the British lacked, and were in the circumstances almost bound to lack, any evidence as to where the blow would fall." 63.

62. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., pp. 254-255.

63. Fleming, Peter: Invasion 1940, p. 169, Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1957.

In actual fact there had been some evidence pointing to the South Coast, which had been reported to the War Cabinet in their Weekly Situation Report, as early as 19th July:

"Air reconnaissance on 16 July showed a considerable number of barges at Cherbourg, Trouville, Le Havre and Honfleur.

A Bomber Command aircraft reported 200-300 barges in the canal between Armentieres and Merville at 05.51 on 16 July." 64.

With the lack, however, of any further evidence from this quarter during the subsequent few weeks, the War Cabinet quickly put this down to normal barge movements, although actually the Germans were probably already beginning to collect together the local shipping. The next report on 26th July, possibly pointing towards an invasion of the East Coast, was to the War Cabinet much more believable:

"There are indications that many fresh troops are arriving in Holland and that Belgium, especially Brussels, is full of troops, of which a high proportion are Luftwaffe." 65.

This was closely followed by a red herring when, on 31st July, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Viscount Halifax, told the War Cabinet that:

".... our Ambassador at Angora had reported that the German Military Attaché had stated that the invasion of Great Britain had been postponed until the first week of August, and that he intended to follow events. On 27th July our Ambassador reported that that German Military Attaché had left Istanbul on the 26th, ostensibly for Belgrade." 66.

The Chiefs of Staff, nevertheless, agreed later the same day to the extension of air reconnaissance to cover certain inland areas by night where it was believed that German troop concentrations might be located. These reconnaissances would supplement the aerial photographic reconnaissances that already gave regular coverage of the Continental coast between

64. CAB 66/9: WP(40)264: also COS(40)554 : Weekly Resumé No. 46 of the Naval, Military and Air Situation, 19 July 1940.

65. CAB 67/7: WP(40)286: also COS(40)575 : Weekly Resumé No. 47 of the Naval, Military and Air Situation, 26 July 1940.

66. CAB 65/8: WM(40)216th:1, 31 July 1940.

Statlandet, in the Shetland Narrows, and Brest.^{67.} Extensive reconnaissance, however, over the next few days yielded little. On 5th August, the Chiefs of Staff agreed "that there were no new developments which pointed to an immediate invasion of this country", while on 8th Aug. the War Cabinet heard that the usual reconnaissances had been flown "without yielding any definite results, save that there were more ships than usual at Emden and 40-50 seaplane troop carriers in the Zuider Zee."^{68.}

This last piece of intelligence, if it meant anything significant at all, again pointed towards an attempt against the East Coast, at least as the War Cabinet, the Chiefs of Staff and their various advisors, still chose to believe. If they reflected that both Julius Caesar and the Duke of Normandy had used the shortest route to the South East, they dismissed the thought, being more influenced, perhaps, by the fictional accounts of the generation immediately prior to the First World War, such as Erskine Childers's classic 'Riddle of the Sands', all of which had described a sudden sweep across the North Sea onto the open, gently shelving beaches of East Anglia with its equally open and gently undulating hinterland that would by 1940 be so suitable for the fast mechanical warfare that the Germans excelled in. The South East and South Coasts, whose beaches were mostly flanked or dominated by cliffs or overlooked by escarpments of downland and whose interior, especially in Kent and Sussex, was mainly of a very close and intricate nature with many hedgerows, woods, narrow lanes and steep slopes, seemed somehow much less likely. The 'tank country' of East Anglia, in short, seemed to the British, with their all too recent experience of the German Blitzkrieg, to be far more suitable for the German's devastating methods of modern warfare than the 'infantry country' of the South East, and while both areas had similar vital ports that had to be captured to sustain and supply a major landing, only East Anglia appeared eminently suitable for the conception that the British had recently formed of a secretly prepared vast armada of special landing-craft, which could disgorge tanks, guns and motor vehicles in great numbers in an initial landing over open beaches.^{69.}

67. CAB 79/5: COS(40)241st:1, 31 July 1940.

68. CAB 79/5: COS(40)248th:1, 5 August 1940; and CAB 65/8: WM(40)222nd:1, 8 August 1940.

69. Longmate, Norman: If Britain Had Fallen, pp. 60-61, B.B.C. & Hutchinson, London, 1972.

The most powerful factor in favour of the East Coast remained until the end of August, however, the continuing lack of evidence produced by aerial photographic reconnaissance on shipping concentrations in potential invasion bases. This negative evidence took two forms. Firstly, although longer sorties enlarged their field of vision, the adequacy of such reconnaissance naturally decreased with distance and the North German and Baltic ports, threatening the East Coast south of The Wash if they threatened anything, remained at best a doubtful factor, while, secondly, from the ports nearest the South East, which were the most easily and therefore the most fully covered by aerial reconnaissance, there remained no evidence of unusual German shipping activity. Moreover, the British, who had been energetically preparing to repel an attack since the middle of May, naturally assumed that Hitler's arrangements to launch an invasion had at the very least kept pace with their own arrangements to defeat it:

"After the first shock of alarm had passed, there were many who thought that Hitler might lose his nerve; none suspected that he had not made up his mind. Prudently, but mistakenly, they credited him with deep-laid plans, concerted long in advance of his opportunity; and when, as July went and August came, they saw in the ports nearest to their shores no signs of those plans being implemented, it was natural to assume that they were maturing in bases beyond the effective scope of the R.A.F.'s reconnaissance. All this strengthened their forebodings about the east coast." 70.

Ultra, too, only provided negative evidence on this vital question of where the blow would fall. Deciphering at Bletchley in this period was primarily of Luftwaffe signals and, although this was to give vital help in winning the battle for supremacy in the air and in helping the staff of Home Forces, the Invasion Warning Sub-Committee and other bodies, in building up a cumulative picture of what was actually happening on the other side of the Channel, it did not give information on any plans which may have been broadcast on the radio nets of the German army and navy (where for amphibious operations they were most likely to be found), because their ciphers were still largely or wholly unbreakable. Moreover, while Hitler's general intention to invade was widely known and the British were able to pick up local details of their preparations which appeared repeatedly to confirm this overall intention, the most secret matters, including the intended front of the invasion, were naturally

70. Fleming, Peter: op. cit., pp. 170-171.

reserved for high level conferences and communications by secure land-line.^{71.}
The actual German plans for the landing, therefore, remained unknown to the British.

Only General Brooke disagreed with the general view that the main German effort would be launched against the East Coast. His warnings, however, continued to go unheeded, since they were not yet backed up by positive evidence gleaned from the Germans by any of the usual or even secret sources of intelligence, but were derived rather from his own recent experience as G.O. C.-in-C. Southern Command, where he had seen at first hand the vulnerabilities of the very long South Coast. These he saw again on his tour of the Kent and Sussex coasts on 7th-8th Aug., and yet again on 13th August when he toured coastal defences between Exmouth and Weymouth, this time in company with the Prime Minister himself who later recalled that, "About the end of the first week in August, General Brooke pointed out that the threat of invasion was developing on the south coast as much as on the east."^{72.}
Although General Brooke was soon, in fact, to be proved right by events, he still failed at this time fully to convince the Prime Minister.

71. Lewin, Ronald: op. cit., p. 94.

72. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., p. 262.

CHAPTER 10: THE DEVELOPING THREAT

Other questions connected with the invasion problem were worrying both the Chiefs of Staff and the War Cabinet during late July and early August. Bearing in mind the Admiralty's estimate on 12th July of 100,000 men that might reach British shores without being interrupted by the Royal Navy, an estimate subsequently doubled by the Prime Minister, did the Germans have adequate shipping for such an attempt? The question was asked by Churchill in a minute written on 20th July, in which he recalled that "a very considerable" effort was required by merchant shipping to sustain, over a very short distance, an invasion of Norway by 100,000 troops. The Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee, considering the matter at the request of the Chiefs of Staff over the next few days, pointed out that although the amount of shipping, due to the greater distances and much heavier casualties the Germans would expect to suffer at the hands of the Royal Navy and the R.A.F. in an invasion of Britain, would be much greater than in the Norwegian invasion, this had to be balanced against the possibility that the initial assault might be largely carried in small craft and by air, instead of in the larger troop transports. Whether the Germans (of which 50,000 would be used in diversions and the remaining 150,000 mainly against the East Coast) would attempt to land adequate supplies to last for a minimum of 14 days purely in the first wave or would attempt to sustain a successful lodgement by running a ferry service between captured ports in Britain and their own ports, concluded the J.I.C. in a detailed report approved by the Chiefs of Staff on 29th July, "the actual shipping required for an invasion would not be a limiting factor".¹ Would the Germans attack under cover of an extensive smoke screen designed to conceal an invasion fleet under passage? Despite the vagaries of the tide, wind, time of day, the considerable resources required to produce such a screen at sea, the hindrance to the Germans' own shipping and its supporting aircraft and the much greater likelihood of the Germans' use of darkness or conditions of low visibility, the J.I.C. nevertheless suggested that the possibilities of such an attack "cannot be ignored" and the Chiefs of Staff, too, agreed that precautions should be taken.²

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1. CAB 80/15, COS(40)566 (JIC), also JIC(40)188 : Amount of Shipping Required to Sustain a German Invasion of the British Isles: Note by the JIC, & Annex A, 22 July 1940; CAB 80/15, COS(40)575 (JIC), also JIC(40)188 revise : *ibid.*, 26 July 1940; CAB 79/5, COS(40)238th:1, 29 July 1940.
 2. CAB 80/15, COS(40)562 (JIC), also JIC(40)186 : Use of Smoke in an Invasion of Great Britain: Report by the JIC, 20 July 1940 & CAB 70/5, COS(40)232nd:3, 24 July 1940.

Questions relating to the Home Front were more the concern of the War Cabinet. The role of the civil population, of the Civil Defence and of the Police in the event of invasion were constant subjects for discussion, although the principle that the actual fighting should be left to the three Services and the Home Guard and that no civilian, unless a member of the latter forces, should be authorised to use lethal weapons, was firmly adhered to. Future Army requirements under the 'Fifty-Five Division Programme', including new armoured divisions and new army tank brigades planned for the next year, and the question of the relative priority of production of various weapons of war (fighters, bombers and training aircraft, their instruments and equipment, A.A. equipment especially Bofors, small arms and ammunition, bombs and component parts to all these, still taking priority over tank production) were among the other issues discussed, clearly showing that once the immediate invasion threat was past they had every intention of going on and winning the War. Even some complacency on the invasion question was displayed at a War Cabinet meeting on 2nd August, when the Chiefs of Staff were asked to advise whether the military situation permitted the removal of the ban on visitors to towns in the defended areas of the coast, with the exception of the Sheringham to Folkestone sector which was felt to be particularly exposed to the threat of invasion, by means of swarms of small boats emerging from the Dutch harbours, and from which some 60% of the population had already left by voluntary evacuation or by special arrangements for children and the elderly.³

This latter suggestion, discussed at a Chiefs of Staff meeting on 5th August at which the C.-in-C. Home Forces was present, horrified General Brooke. Only partial measures had been taken to stimulate voluntary evacuation along the remainder of the East and South Coasts, apart from an evacuation of school children from the South Coast, and in both of these defended and therefore sensitive areas the only restriction on the normal movement of the civil population was the ban on visitors. Even this restriction, according to General Sir William Bartholomew, Chief of the Civil Defence Operational Staff, had somewhat surprisingly never been applied in the Brighton to Southsea sector on the South Coast. "If visitors were to be admitted freely to these areas," objected General Brooke,

3. CAB 65/8, WM(40)218th:4, 2 August 1940.

".... they would be at liberty to study the details of the beaches and other defences, an undesirable state of affairs.... There would be a considerable risk of casualties to visitors from contact with beach mines; there had already been a number of accidents to troops. The raising of the ban of admission ... might have a most unfortunate psychological effect throughout the country. The civilian population and the army would interpret such action as implying, contrary to the recent announcement by the Prime Minister, that the danger of invasion was less imminent and there would in consequence be a general relaxation of precautions."

It appeared "illogical," he continued,

"to retain the ban on towns between Sheringham and Folkestone and to lift it upon adjacent East and South Coast towns where the threat of invasion seemed just as great." 4.

The Chiefs of Staff readily agreed and a report on these lines subsequently dissuaded the War Cabinet from removing the ban. This incident, however, reflected the degree of complacency that was creeping into a civilian population that had been alerted to an invasion since May and was already slipping back into large population centres such as London. A German leaflet raid over Hampshire and Somerset on 1st August, dropping English texts of Hitler's 19th July speech to the Reichstag, had been treated almost as something of a joke, while on 3rd August, the beginning of a Bank Holiday weekend, the Prime Minister had to issue a warning against "the slightest relaxation of vigilance". The greatest test, though, was yet to come. As for the matter of the absence of a ban on visitors in the Brighton-Southsea sector, this was referred to the Home Defence Executive, since "the canalizing of holiday traffic on the roads and railways leading to this part of the coast presented potential military dangers". 5.

Then there were also the matters of the overall command of, and co-operation between, the three Services and the role of those three Services in the event of an invasion. The idea of a supreme commander wielding authority over all the branches of Home Defence had been firmly rejected by the Chiefs of Staff early in July on the grounds that, even if the right man were chosen for this great responsibility, he would need the help of an integrated staff, the creation of which would "superimpose a cumbersome and top-heavy incubus" on the existing staffs of the fighting services. Such a

4. CAB 79/5, COS(40)247th:1, 5 August 1940.

5. CAB 65/8, WM(40)222nd:5, 8 August 1940, & CAB 79/5, COS(40)247th:1, 5 August 1940.

re-organisation, too, would mean the disruption of the existing established system at a critical time for the survival of the Nation. The Admiralty, the Air Ministry and General Brooke, as C.-in-C. Home Forces under the overall direction of the War Office, therefore continued to control their respective Commands, with General Brooke being given control of all troops in Great Britain and Northern Ireland (except Anti-Aircraft Command) if an invasion occurred. The system of liaison officers at the higher formations of Home Forces, complemented by senior naval and air officers at G.H.Q. Hammersmith, to keep General Brooke in touch with the other Services, the Advanced H.Q. of Home Forces near the Cabinet War Room, to give him a close link with the Government and Chiefs of Staff once the invasion had started, and the links between the naval and air branches of maritime defence via the various Area Combined H.Q.'s and the C.-in-C. Coastal Command, were all maintained throughout the invasion crisis of 1940, although the Chiefs of Staff certainly felt on 24th July that the machinery for the co-ordination of action taken by the three Services on receipt of already-pooled invasion intelligence could be improved somewhat.⁶ General Brooke in particular, however, continued to remain unhappy about the existing arrangements for the overall command and co-operation between the three fighting Services, especially about the division of authority. He later wrote:

"There was, however, one point above all others that constituted a grave danger in the defensive organisation of this country; there was no form of combined Command over the three Services. And yet their roles were intimately locked together.... There were far too many Commanders.... There was no co-ordinating head of this mass of Commanders beyond the Chiefs of Staff Committee and the Admiralty, the Air Ministry and War Office.

It was a highly dangerous organisation; had an invasion developed, I fear that Churchill would have attempted as Defence Minister to co-ordinate the action of these various Commands. This would have been wrong and highly dangerous, with his impulsive nature and tendency to arrive at decisions through a process of intuition, as opposed to 'logical approach'.... He held periodic Conferences of Commanders-in-Chief, which were attended by all the Coastal Naval Commanders-in-Chief thus giving the Naval side too great a preponderance in these discussions when the Army was represented by one member and the R.A.F. by three." 7.

On 26th July General Brooke attended a Chiefs of Staff meeting on the role of the three operational Commands of the R.A.F. in the event of an

6. Collier, Basil: History of the Second World War: The Defence of the United Kingdom, p. 145., H.M.S.O., London, 1957; & CAB 79/5, COS(40) 232nd:1, 24 July 1940.

7. Autobiographical Notes of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, Vol. IV, pp. 229-230.

invasion, although the discussion amounted in fact to an appreciation of the probable form and order of an invasion or raid and an indication of the action to be taken by all three Services. Recognising that the Germans had to secure a virtual air supremacy so as to secure their sea communications before a full-scale invasion could even get under way, the Air Staff maintained that the first phase of operations would be a large scale air offensive against all aspects of the British fighter defence, an offensive to be countered by Fighter Command in the air, while Coastal and Bomber Commands concentrated on locating and bombing respectively any massed enemy troops or shipping, whether in harbour or at sea. Enemy aerodromes, her aircraft industry, oil targets and communications would continue to be bombed at this stage. This first phase was likely to be accompanied by heavy enemy air attacks on the Royal Navy and its bases, especially on the destroyer and small ship flotillas off the East and South East coasts. Any German use of airborne or air-landing troops at any stage of the operations could only be countered by Fighter Command; but once the German invasion by sea had begun, Bomber Command would really come into its own, striking at the enemy transport vessels at sea and at any enemy troop concentrations that had landed, all the while protected in the air as far as possible by the fighters, whose other and primary task would be to protect the Royal Naval forces, small or large, which were to operate against the German flanks. In this last instance, the fighters' priority target would be the enemy dive bombers that had already proved to be such a serious threat to the activities of the Navy. Coastal Command throughout was to concentrate on its primary role of reconnaissance, supplementing this with attacks with bombs or torpedoes on enemy transport ships wherever possible. It was the provision of the "fighter umbrella" for the protection of the Navy, however, that worried General Brooke most. With the fighters thus employed, "Our own troops defending the bridgehead would have to rely on their own weapons and on measures of passive defence when attacked by dive bombers." Both these troops and those of the reserve formations moving up to counter-attack, General Brooke argued, would therefore need the protection of plentiful mobile light A.A. units, which would have to be allocated without delay so as to give them adequate time to train properly with the troops they were to protect. Such protection, moreover, it was pointed out, would only be gained at present at the expense of the light A.A. protection of, amongst other things, the R.A.F.'s aerodromes. 8.

8. CAB 79/5, COS(40)235th:1, & Annexe, 26 July 1940.

General Brooke clearly remained unhappy about this situation. He confided to his diary that same evening:

"I came away feeling less confident as to our powers of avoiding an invasion. The attitude of representatives of the Naval Commander brought out very clearly the fact that the Navy now realizes fully that its position on the sea has been seriously undermined by the advent of aircraft. Sea supremacy is no longer what it was, and in the face of strong bomber forces can no longer ensure the safety of this island against invasion. This throws a much heavier task on the Army." 9.

In complete contrast to Churchill, who confidently believed that the Royal Navy "invariably undertook the apparently impossible without a moment's hesitation whenever the situation so demanded", General Brooke also harboured other misgivings about the Navy's ability to reduce the pressure on the Army if invasion occurred. He later wrote:

"I soon discovered that the Home Fleet, in the event of an invasion, had little intention of coming further south than The Wash. As destroyers were also being drawn off to protect Western Approaches, the naval defence in the Channel and southern waters did not appear to be able to offer the required interference with German landing operations. On the other hand, the Admiralty and naval commanders were inclined to criticize freely Army dispositions.... Had I listened to these criticisms I should have had to employ practically the whole of my forces solely for the defence of naval bases by concentrating men on the beaches in their vicinity." 10.

General Brooke was, of course, exaggerating. The C.-in-C. Home Fleet, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Charles Forbes, in view of the recent losses to the strength of the Home Fleet off Norway, at Dunkirk and to the Mediterranean theatre of operations, combined with an overestimation of the strength of the German Navy by the Admiralty, indeed had strong misgivings about stationing his heavier ships away from Scapa Flow and was greatly worried about rising shipping losses in the North West Approaches, Britain's vital supply line from North America. He had, however, been informed by the Admiralty at the beginning of July that the task of repelling an invasion was to take priority over the safeguarding of Britain's supply lifeline, at least for the time being, and consequently the Naval Commands covering the North Sea and Channel had been strengthened by cruisers and some further smaller ships dispersed at the various ports by Admiralty order. The prevention of a knock-out blow clearly had to take

9. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 26 July 1940.

10. Autobiographical Notes of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, Vol. IV, pp. 229-230.

priority over the prospect of a slow strangulation. The Admiralty, nevertheless, recognized that the premature diversion of too many destroyers from the Atlantic might have very serious results and forbid the Navy's capital ships to venture into the southern part of the North Sea until the enemy's heavy ships had done so.¹¹ As in the cases of both the Army and the R.A.F., it was the old story of vitally important, but conflicting, demands on inadequate or limited resources, at a time when a major mistake could have lost the War for Britain.

Just a few days later, on 7th August, the Prime Minister himself submitted an important memorandum on defence against invasion to the Chiefs of Staff Committee. His own view on the role of the three Services in the event of invasion was clearly outlined:

"Our first line of defence against invasion must be as ever the enemy's ports. Air reconnaissance, submarine watching, and other means of obtaining information should be followed by resolute attacks with all our forces available and suitable upon any concentrations of enemy shipping.

Our second line of defence is the vigilant patrolling of the sea to intercept any invading expedition, and to destroy it in transit.

Our third line is the counterattack upon the enemy when he makes any landfall, and particularly while he is engaged in the act of landing. This attack, which has long been ready from the sea, must be reinforced by air action; and both sea and air attacks must be continued so that it becomes impossible for the invader to nourish his lodgements.

The land defences and the Home Army are maintained primarily for the purpose of making the enemy come in such large numbers as to afford a proper target to the sea and air forces above mentioned, and to make hostile preparations and movements noticeable to air and other forms of reconnaissance."¹²

One of Churchill's chief concerns in this memorandum, however, was again the question of where the invasion blow would fall and the relative vulnerability of the various sectors of coast. The Prime Minister was well aware of the "immense cost in war energy" and the disadvantages of trying to defend the whole coastline of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, over 2,000 miles in length, of which over 800 miles were assailable, a frontage

11. Butler, J. R. M. (ed.): History of the Second World War: Grand Strategy, Vol. II, pp. 280-281, H.M.S.O., London, 1957; & Roskill, Captain S. W.: History of the Second World War: The War At Sea, Vol. I, Chapter XIII, H.M.S.O., London, 1954.

12. CAB 66/10, WP(40)319, also COS(40) 604 Revise, Annexe I: Defence Against Invasion: Note by the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, 5 August 1940.

twice as long as the combined French, British and Belgian forces had failed to hold in May. True, the Germans could not hope to attack this vast circumference simultaneously, yet the extent of their fighter range still meant they could cover a landfall or landfalls made on any beach between The Wash and the Bristol Channel. His own Chief of Staff, Major General Hastings 'Pug' Ismay, who accompanied Churchill on many of his frequent visits to the threatened areas, later recalled:

"From time to time Churchill would suggest to a commander that the defence of such and such an area ought to be strengthened. The commander would wholeheartedly agree, but point out that this could only be done by weakening some other equally important sector. Churchill used to say that he felt like a man trying to go to sleep on a very cold night with a blanket which was too small for him. If his feet were covered, his shoulders would get cold; and if he pulled up the blanket to cover his shoulders, some other part of his body had to suffer." 13.

The sector from The Wash round to Dover, the Prime Minister still believed, would be the most threatened. Besides the Germans here having the advantage of the narrow seas, "this sector of the coast front is also nearest to the supreme enemy objective, London". 14. Certainly Dover, as Major General Ismay recalled, ".... exercised a particular attraction for him it seemed certain to be in the 'invasion area'." 15. Not only this, but the second most important sector in the Prime Minister's estimation was that from the Cromarty Firth to The Wash, again on the East Coast. "The Tyne," he wrote in his memorandum, "must be regarded as the second major objective after London, for here (and to a lesser extent at the Tees) grievous damage could be done by an invader or large-scale raider in a short time." On this sector, however, he added that not only were all harbours and inlets defended both from the sea and from the rear, but the sea and air conditions were more favourable to the defender than to the southward, while the defenders should be able "to counter-attack in superior force within twenty-four hours". 16.

13. Ismay, General the Lord: Memoirs, p. 186, Heinemann, London, 1960.

14. CAB 66/10, WP(40)319, also COS(40)604 Revise : op. cit.

15. Ismay, General the Lord: op. cit., p. 186.

16. CAB 66/10, WP(40)319, also COS(40)604 Revise : op. cit.

Despite General Brooke's warnings to the contrary, however, Churchill still believed that "the sector from Dover to Land's End is far less menaced", at least so long as the Navy and R.A.F. could prevent any mass of shipping or escorting warships from passing into the French Channel ports. Doubling the Admiralty's 12th July estimate of only 5,000 Germans attacking this wide area from the Channel ports (though omitting the 20,000 that the Admiralty had estimated might be sent from the distant Bay of Biscay ports), he went on, "It should be possible to make good arrangements for speedy counter-attack in superior numbers, and at the same time to achieve large economies of force on this southern sector, in which the beach troops should be at their minimum and the mobile reserves at their maximum. These mobile reserves must be available to move to the south-eastern sectors at short notice." Significantly, however, he added, "Evidently this situation can be judged only from week to week." ¹⁷.

As for the remaining areas, Churchill quite rightly considered these to be the least vulnerable to invasion. The long sea journey for any enemy expedition from Western France or from Norway, the vulnerability of any such expedition to the larger ships of the Royal Navy and equally to superior air-power in these, and the distance of any lodgements from any significant objectives, made any enemy landing in the sectors from North Cornwall round to the Cromarty Firth extremely unlikely. The local protection of the West Coast ports from the sea and landward side should suffice, with a much longer period allowed for counter-attack, together with the proposed mine-field from Cornwall to Ireland. "Should we, for instance, care to send twelve thousand men unescorted in merchant ships to land on the Norwegian coast, or in the Skagerrak and Kattegat, in face of superior sea-power and air-power? It would be thought madness." Raids or diversions would be the most serious enemy activity expected. The Prime Minister then went on to assign a relative scale of danger for the various coastal sectors: a figure of five for The Wash to Dover sector, three for Cromarty Firth to The Wash, one and a half from Dover to Land's End, the sector which the Germans were in fact preparing to attack, and a mere fraction for West and Northern coastlines.

The Prime Minister's appreciation was discussed by the Chiefs of Staff on 12th August. General Brooke, also present at this meeting, pointed out that the figures in the memorandum were based mainly on the scales of seaborne attack, whereas the actual distribution of the defence took into

17. *ibid.*

account the threat from airborne attack as well. The Prime Minister had also omitted the possible threat from the ports of the Bay of Biscay. Nevertheless, he continued, scaling up the Prime Minister's proportional figures and equating them with the actual distribution of the twenty-six formed divisions, infantry and armoured, presently deployed for the defence of mainland Britain, he had found that, with only a few exceptions, the resulting figures "tallied almost exactly" with the latter. Eight and a half divisions were deployed in the Cromarty Firth to The Wash sector in the middle of August (see Map 9), compared with the Prime Minister's theoretical figure of seven and a half. A total of fifteen divisions (including two armoured) were, in fact, deployed between The Wash and Cornwall. Of these, six, including two in reserve (in IV Corps), were deployed to the north of the Thames, with a seventh around Dover itself, while a further five, including one in Southern Command Reserve, covered the coastline between Dover and Cornwall. The remaining three, those of VII Corps, were in reserve to the south of the Thames and could intervene if necessary either in the Dover promontory or along the South Coast as far westward as Hampshire. This compared with the Prime Minister's theoretical estimate of twelve and a half for The Wash to Dover sector, but only four and a quarter for the long Dover to Cornwall sector, a total of sixteen and three-quarters. As General Brooke pointed out, the actual and theoretical total figures for these two sectors taken together differed "only slightly", but the higher emphasis on The Wash to Dover sector by the Prime Minister again showed Churchill's concern for the safety of the East Anglian Coast and the Dover promontory, and his comparative lack of worry about the South Coast.

General Brooke, however, continued to maintain his opposite view, a view that can readily be demonstrated by comparing the Prime Minister's theoretical figures with General Brooke's actual dispositions. General Brooke, nevertheless, felt he had to justify this difference to the Chiefs of Staff, especially since they themselves tended to favour the East Coast sector. The fact that the South Coast defences were "slightly in excess of those theoretically required", he explained, was "due largely to the threat of airborne invasion". Moreover, "as the South Coast could also be brought under the German fighter 'umbrella' and was within twelve hours' sea voyage of hostile territory, it would seem sound to over-insure slightly on this part of the coast". The threat of airborne attack, too, he mentioned, also applied to the long Western and remote Northern coastlines where two and a half divisions were deployed, compared with the one and three-quarters of the Prime Minister's estimate, while the uncertainty regarding the security

of the Irish Republic could not be totally ignored. Finally, he explained, the figure of twenty-six divisions on which his calculations had been based "did not allow for semi-trained troops which were not yet suitable for employment in a counter-offensive role, and had therefore not been pulled back from the beaches". Nor, indeed, he might have added, did they include the various independent brigades and brigade-groups which were deployed for Home Defence in addition to the formed divisions. ¹⁸.

The Chiefs of Staff, happy with General Brooke's appreciation, submitted a report very much along the Commander-in-Chief's lines to the Prime Minister the very next day. They did state in their report, however, their opinion that, "We may seem at present to be slightly over-insured along the South Coast," although they repeated General Brooke's justification for this. ¹⁹. In actual fact, however, in view of the powerful German forces massing opposite this sector on the far side of the English Channel, they were heavily under-insured. Five divisions stretched along a very long South Coast, even if rapidly reinforced by the three divisions of VII Corps, was in reality a very precarious situation. The reason why this alarming situation was allowed to occur, however, remained simply the continuing lack of evidence of any enemy concentration of shipping in the Channel ports.

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The various sources of intelligence, including aerial photo-reconnaissance, continued to yield but little in this respect. The Chiefs of Staff were by now becoming seriously worried. On 12th August, they agreed that:

".... the continued lack of Service Intelligence from enemy occupied countries was a cause of grave concern.... We had now been 'blind' for two months on troop and naval movements within enemy occupied territory and there was little evidence to show any prospect of improvement in the near future." ²⁰.

The Directors of Intelligence were asked to look at methods of obtaining "more satisfactory" Service Intelligence.

18. CAB 79/6, COS(40)260th:2, 12 August 1940.

19. CAB 66/10, WP(40)319, Annex II: Defence Against Invasion: Note by Chiefs of Staff, 13 August 1940.

20. CAB 79/6, COS(40)261st:1, 12 August 1940.

Next day, however, saw a new development as the struggle in the air began in earnest. The Germans' much vaunted 'Eagle Day', though no surprise to the Prime Minister and the Chiefs of Staff who had long been warned of its imminence through 'Ultra', opened with heavy and co-ordinated attacks on airfields, radar stations and other important targets in the South East and South. Could this indicate a German assault by sea on this sector? Certainly a report coming in to G.H.Q. Home Forces that Austrian mountain divisions, fully equipped for climbing the Kentish and Sussex cliffs, had been seen in the Pas de Calais area, seemed to General Brooke to support this view, although another report, seemingly just as reliable, indicated that a German invasion force in Norway had actually already embarked.²¹ The latter report, possibly a ruse, was soon proved to be false, but it temporarily diverted the Chiefs of Staff's attention from events in Southern England. That same night came fresh evidence suggesting an invasion or a feint against the North. The War Cabinet heard the following day, the 14th, as widespread German air attacks on airfields continued, that:

".... reports had been received from the Police that forty-five parachutes had been found, apparently abandoned by enemy parachutists, in various districts in Scotland, Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Yorkshire. In one case a box with maps and instructions was said to have been found. Two parachutists were reported to have been captured, one in civilian clothing." ²².

The widest publicity, the War Cabinet decided, should be given to these landings of enemy parachutists, if confirmed, in order to enlist the help of the civilian population.

This parachute scare, too, soon turned out to be nothing more than a poor attempt by the Germans to undermine British morale. It had been closely followed by a transmission from the German run 'New British Broadcasting Station' to the effect that the first contingent of German parachutists had landed in Britain, that the equipment found included maps and written instructions and that the landings had caused much anxiety in the districts concerned. Further transmissions by the N.B.B.S. over the next few days tried to exploit the ruse, attempting to play on British fears about parachutists and Fifth Columnists. The British were not convinced, however.

21. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 13 August 1940.

22. CAB 65/8, WM(40)226th:2, 14 August 1940.

The absence of tracks in the dew and standing corn from the supposedly occupied parachutes was just one of several things that gave the game away.²³ Although N.B.B.S. broadcasts on the subject continued until 20th August, the War Cabinet had heard as early as the 15th that:

"At least eighty parachutes had been discovered, but there was no evidence that any parachutists had descended with them. The report that two parachutists had been apprehended was untrue." 24.

The 15th August also saw the heaviest enemy air attacks so far, on airfields and other targets, not only on the South and South East, but on the North East from Norway as well. Much damage was caused at Lympne, Hawking, Martlesham, Driffild, Middle Wallop and at Croydon, where a number of civilian casualties were suffered, while the air battles were intense. The attacks on airfields and the accompanying struggle in the air continued in the South and South East on the 16th, with Tangmere being especially badly hit. "The recent activities of the German Air Force," the War Cabinet heard that day, "suggest the opening phase of an attempt to gain air superiority by a process of exhausting our fighter defences. This policy is not proving successful, and the German Air Force have suffered heavy casualties" The War Cabinet also heard that day from their Resumé of the past week's events that:

"Information during this period points to the continuation of preparations for invasion. It is probable, however, that the Germans will not finally decide upon invasion until the results of the present air attacks upon the United Kingdom have been appreciated." 25.

The War Cabinet were unknowingly correct in that, although Hitler had in fact set 15th September as the date for the commencement of Operation Sea Lion, as early as 31st July at the Berghof conference, his final decision to invade would depend on the result of the air battles now taking place over Southern England.

The heavy air activity of the last week was followed by a lull on 17th August, but co-ordinated and heavy air attacks on airfields in the South and

23. Fleming, Peter: Invasion 1940, pp. 127-130, Rupert Hart Davis, London, 1957.

24. CAB 65/8, WM(40)228th:3, 15 August 1940.

25. CAB 66/10, WP(40)317, also COS(40)633 : Weekly Resumé No. 50, 16 August 1940.

South East were resumed on the 18th, causing much damage at Kenley and at Poling radar station. Then, seemingly exhausted by their efforts, there was little enemy air activity for the next five days. Was this the calm before the storm? Still there was no evidence of German shipping concentrating in the Channel ports, yet the respite led to a fresh spate of rumours and speculation about German intentions. On 19th August, for example, the War Cabinet were seriously worried by reports that had been allowed to appear in some of that morning's newspapers to the effect that:

".... five divisions of troops were said to be massed on the French beaches opposite the South East Coast, ready to embark for an attempted invasion and that they had been bombed by the R.A.F.." 26.

On 22nd August a new German weapon began operating against the vulnerable South East corner of the English coastline. Having fired a number of ranging shots over the past ten days, enemy heavy artillery batteries placed on and around Cap Gris Nez now began a prolonged bombardment of Dover, a development accompanied by boasts by the German propaganda radio of their intent to land in the area. The War Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff, however, saw this new development as an attempt by the Germans to close the Straits of Dover to British shipping. The German firing, though, soon proved to be slow and intermittent, while the guns, at their maximum range, were not very accurate. The firing was answered, moreover, by British heavy artillery batteries.

"Our own heavies had been manufactured in 1918, when Churchill was Minister of Munitions, and had, on his insistence, been carefully maintained ever since. It was on his orders that they had been installed at Dover as a counter to the German heavies at Calais and Cap Gris Nez. It is doubtful whether these monsters had any significant practical effect, but they were good for the morale of their respective sides. It is consoling to a man who is under bombardment to know that his enemy is catching it too." 27.

The long range artillery activity, however, was still not definitive evidence for an invasion. "No serious threat of invasion yet exists from the Netherlands, French or south-west Norwegian ports," reported the Invasion Warning Sub-Committee, one of several intelligence bodies, to the Chiefs of Staff the next day. "This is evidenced by the lack of shipping

26. CAB 65/8, WM(40)230th:6, 19 August 1940.

27. Ismay, General the Lord: op. cit., p. 186.

concentrations on these coasts." The same story was told to the War Cabinet the same day in their latest Weekly Resumé.²⁸

The following day, 24th August, saw a new phase in the air battle. The heavy and systematic daylight attacks on airfields in the South, South East and Essex were resumed, combined with German fighter sweeps and bombing attacks on ports and aircraft factories. Harassing attacks were also continued on industrial targets, communications and military establishments. The development that marked this as a new phase, lasting until 6th September, was the beginning of heavy night attacks. To these the R.A.F. in 1940 had almost no answer. Birmingham and the Midland towns, Plymouth, Liverpool-Birkenhead, Swansea, Bristol and other ports and industrial towns all suffered, and on 5th and 6th September the London docks received the serious attention of the German bombers for the first time. In the daylight battles, the R.A.F. fighters, fighting desperately and at their most stretched, just managed to hold their own as losses mounted on both sides and the strain of continuous combat began to take its toll.

The 26th August saw a long discussion by the Chiefs of Staff on the latest reports concerning German preparations. Very little mention was made of the South East, however, the Chiefs of Staff examining in detail instead the threat from other, less likely, directions. Recent German troop movements along the coast of Norway might indicate preparations for an operation against Scotland or even Iceland, but more worrying were reports of German reconnaissance aircraft taking "a great interest" in aerodromes in the extreme South West of England. Certain aerodromes had been visited "two and three times daily" by enemy reconnaissance aircraft. The Germans might be contemplating a diversion in the area to draw British forces away from South East England. A report, moreover, had been received through the Military Attache, Washington, of a German plan:

".... to land a force from rubber motor boats in South West England, with the object of cutting off Devon and Cornwall and then advancing up the Severn basin and down the Thames basin, thus cutting off the South of England."

The Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, had not surprisingly regarded this rather unlikely report as "unreliable", but the Chiefs of Staff nevertheless

28. Fleming, Peter: op. cit., p. 173; and CAB 66/11, WP(40)334
also COS(40)656 : Weekly Resumé No. 51, 23 August 1940.

instructed that he should inform the Committee of what arrangements he had made to replace the Marine Brigade, that had recently been removed from the Plymouth area, and of "his general dispositions to meet any attempted enemy attacks aiming at a diversion in that area." 29.

"There are three ways," the Chiefs of Staff stated on 29th August during a discussion of the existing strategical situation, "in which Germany might break the resistance of the United Kingdom." Of these, invasion, even at this late hour, was still considered to be the Germans' least likely option, after unrestricted air attack aimed at breaking public morale and crippling British industry, and the starvation of the country by attacks on the ports and the shipping lifelines. Although admitting that an attempt to invade the country was "possible", they remained "confident of our ability to resist it successfully". They continued:

"It could only have a reasonable chance of success under favourable weather conditions and after air superiority had been established. Favourable weather conditions cannot be counted on after the middle of September and little time now remains for gaining air superiority before the weather breaks. The chances of success have now receded, and the effects of a failure would be so great, that we think the enemy is more likely to concentrate her efforts against this country in naval and air attacks on our shipping and ports, combined with air attacks on industry and morale. This, indeed, is already being done, although not yet on the maximum scale. The effects of German attacks so far show no sign of producing serious results." 30.

"At the same time," the Chiefs of Staff nevertheless added, "Germany will no doubt complete all her preparations for the invasion of the United Kingdom if she considers that conditions are suitable." The Chiefs of Staff's doubts on the matter of an attempt at invasion contrasted strangely with Churchill's apparent certainty. Referring to the Ultra scoop of 19th July, which had provided the first firm evidence of the Germans' intent to invade, he later wrote:

"Our excellent Intelligence confirmed that the operation 'Sea Lion' had been definitely ordered by Hitler and was in active preparation. It seemed certain that the man was going to try." 31.

29. CAB 79/6, COS(40)280th:1, 26 August 1940.

30. CAB 79/6, COS(40)285th:1, 29 August 1940.

31. Churchill, W. S.: Vol. II, Their Finest Hour, p. 261, Cassell, London, 1949.

Where, then, were the expected German concentrations of invasion shipping, and on which sector of the British coastline did they indicate that the main attack might fall? Until 28th August there had been very little positive evidence, but later that day air photographs were developed that showed 40 to 50 merchant ships at Kiel and 350 large motor launches at Emden, which had not been there a fortnight earlier. This was a new and unusual feature, but it might indicate an attempt against the East Coast and was no evidence of any threat to the South East. The Invasion Warning Sub-Committee were certainly unimpressed. The merchant ships at Kiel were quite possibly held up there by "suspected mining or other temporary restrictions", while "some simple explanation in connection with canal or other water traffic" might explain the presence of the possible invasion craft at Emden, though the Committee admitted that there may be some significance. Indeed, it was noted on 30th August that only 300 craft were present at Emden and further decreases were to be noticed by air reconnaissance visits to the port on 3rd and 5th September. ^{32.}

Where were these craft heading for? At first it was not known. Other reports were now beginning to come in. It was known that certain types of German shipping had been recalled to the German Baltic ports and it was learned from secret sources that German troops had been carrying out embarkation exercises in these ports. It was noted, too, that the Stuka short-range dive bomber aircraft, which had been withdrawn from the air battle over England on 18th August so as to conserve their strength, were now being moved to forward aerodromes in the Pas de Calais area, presumably in preparation for re-deployment against this country, while 160 long-range bomber aircraft also were being transferred from Norway to Belgium, probably as a result of the losses inflicted on Luftflotte 5 on 15th August during their abortive raid on the North East Coast. The aircraft movements alone, however, were no proof of a seaborne invasion attempt. On 30th August a possible threat from a new direction was indicated when air reconnaissance spotted an assembly of requisitioned fishing boats at Brest. ^{33.}

The Chiefs of Staff maintained their confidence, despite this growing evidence that something was afoot. "The security of the United Kingdom is absolutely vital, and must be our primary consideration," they stated on

32. CAB 80/18, COS(40)721(JIC), also JIC(40)273 : Possible German Attack against the U.K.: Report by the JIC, 7 Sept. 1940; & Fleming, Peter: op. cit., p. 173.

33. CAB 80/18, COS(40)721(JIC), also JIC(40)273 : op. cit.

31st August, although, "we do not underrate the grave threat with which we are faced, in view of our numerical inferiority in the air and Germany's occupation of the Continental seaboard." ³⁴. The German shelling across the Straits of Dover, too, occupied much of their attention. Experiments were undertaken to devise a klaxon horn warning system that would sound to give about a minute's warning from observation of the flashes along the French coast of the arrival of the shells. A series of strongly worded memoranda from the Prime Minister hastened the placing of further long-range heavy guns in the Dover area. "It would not seem unreasonable that the enemy should attempt gradually to master the Dover promontary, and to command the Channel at its narrowest point," was Churchill's fear:

"This would be a natural preliminary to invasion. It would give occasion for continual fighting with our Air Force in the hope of exhausting them by numbers. It would tend to drive our warships from the Channel bases. The concentration of many batteries on the French coast must be expected. What are we doing in defence of the Dover promontary by heavy artillery? We must insist upon maintaining superior artillery positions on the Dover promontary, no matter what form of attack they are exposed to. We have to fight for command of the Straights by artillery, to destroy the enemy's batteries, and to multiply and fortify our own." ³⁵.

On 3rd September, all the guns on shore in the Dover area were placed under Army control, but, while additional British guns were installed from this time onward, the numbers emplaced in 1940 were to remain markedly fewer than the numbers installed by the Germans. Most guns on both sides of the Channel, however, were only mounted for defensive purposes (i.e. to cover ports and beaches and to support counter-attacks) or were mainly used against shipping targets to little effect, and even the longest-ranged guns would have proved to be very inaccurate if used solely for a counter-battery role. The large target of Dover, nevertheless, was to be engaged by the German guns no less than six times at irregular intervals during September, the heaviest attack being on 9th September when over 150 shells were fired. The bombardment was replied to by the sole British gun so far emplaced, a 14" naval gun, that could reach all the way across the Channel, while on the night of 29th/30th September the monitor H.M.S. Erebus, with two 15" guns, was to carry out a retaliatory bombardment of Calais. ³⁶.

34. CAB 79/6, COS(40)289th:1, 31 August 1940.

35. CAB 80/17, COS(40)669: German Coastal Batteries: Annex I: Prime Minister to General Ismay for the COS Committee, 27 August 1940.

36. CAB 79/6, COS(40)292nd:2, 3 Sept. 1940; & Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., pp. 238-245.

Reports of concentrations of small enemy shipping were by now coming in steadily. On 1st and 2nd September, air reconnaissance flights reported large numbers of barges building up in the Dutch estuaries and the Ter Neusen-Ghent-Bruges-Ostend Canals. The speed at which concentrations of barges accumulated was noted as being most marked. At Hansweert on the 1st, for example, the numbers of barges had increased by 85 in only 24 hours. Furthermore, concentrations of motor transport and of ammunition stores were observed at the mouths of the canals at Ghent and Bruges, which indicated that the barges were loading.³⁷ Even at this late stage, the area of these concentrations still indicated that East Anglia or perhaps the Dover promontary was the target area. No enemy shipping in any quantity had yet been observed passing through the Straits of Dover. The latest news, however, was beginning to worry both the Chiefs of Staff and the War Cabinet. "The indications pointing to invasion had never been more positive than they were at the present time," stated the First Sea Lord at a War Cabinet meeting on 2nd September, and the Secretary of State for War had wholeheartedly agreed. "The use of barges and small fishing craft," moreover, Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Dudley Pound, believed, was "out of the question" during the winter months and they would most likely be used before the 21st September when the possibility of equinoctial gales made the weather thereafter extremely uncertain. The Prime Minister, on the other hand, was sceptical of an invasion attempt so soon. He regarded fog, which was more likely in the autumn, as "a great ally to an invader, more especially as fog was usually accompanied by a calm sea." Nevertheless, despite the unease over growing evidence pointing to invasion, a decision was made to make provisional shipping arrangements for a further 22,000 troops from the United Kingdom to be sent as reinforcements to the Middle East towards the end of September, by which time the invasion question was expected to be resolved one way or the other. True, the departure of these 22,000 reinforcements, which would comprise the Australian Infantry Force and the bulk of the 2nd New Zealand Division, would be partly balanced by the 11,200 further Canadian troops even this day arriving in the Clyde in six liners escorted by H.M.S. Revenge, but the War Cabinet even discussed adding the entire, though incomplete, 1st Armoured Division, a significant proportion of the armoured strength of General Brooke's G.H.Q. Reserve, to the proposed convoy. In the event, however, the growing evidence of an

37. CAB 106/1198: Air Reconnaissance Reports on Enemy Barge Concentrations in the Channel Ports, 1-2 Sept. 1940.

imminent invasion and the Prime Minister's fears of an attempt later in the autumn, caused the War Cabinet to defer their decision on the latter reinforcement until not later than 10th September. ³⁸.

"A large scale invasion is unlikely," wrote the Prime Minister in a memorandum on the munitions situation the next day, 3rd September, though he continued to maintain that "the danger of invasion will not disappear with the coming of winter". ³⁹. The Invasion Warning Sub-Committee remained equally unimpressed, too, even as fresh reports from air reconnaissance flights came in showing increases of 140 barges since 16th August at Terneuzen, of 90 barges since 1st September at the southern end of the Beveland Canal, and of 50 barges since 31st August at Ostend. ⁴⁰. Unbeknown to the British, Hitler had this day issued a definite timetable from his headquarters, setting the date for the sailing of the invasion fleet as the 20th September and for the landing as the 21st. Orders for the commencement of the attack would be given ten days before it took place, that is, presumably, on the 11th September. The time delay was calculated not only to give the invasion forces time to complete their preparations, but, more importantly, to give Goering a few more days to achieve the vital necessity of mastery in the air struggle.

The concentration of barges over the last few days had pointed to a possible invasion of East Anglia or a descent, perhaps, on the Dover promontary. However, there came a significant and relatively sudden change over the next three days that at last convinced the Chiefs of Staff and the War Cabinet that the threat was to the South Coast or, at least, in Churchill's words, that "the front to be attacked was altogether different from or additional to the East Coast, on which the Chiefs of Staff, the Admiralty and I, in full agreement, still laid the major emphasis". ⁴¹.

This new development began slowly, as did British realization of its true significance. The first indication of a general south-westerly movement of the barges occurred on 4th September, when self-propelled barges were spotted moving at speed at sea off Cap Gris Nez. Boulogne and Calais,

38. CAB 65/8 & 15, WM(40)239th:14, & Confidential Annex, 2 Sept. 1940.

39. CAB 66/11, WP(40)352: The Munitions Situation: Memorandum by the Prime Minister, 3 Sept. 1940.

40. Fleming, Peter: op. cit., p. 173.

41. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., p. 261.

the two ports nearest the English coast, however, remained free of barge concentrations, while little of note was yet apparent at Dunkirk or at ports wouth of Boulogne. Still the vast majority of barges remained in the Belgian and Dutch canals and the Dutch estuaries, a group of 76 being seen that day off Flushing by air reconnaissance. The Chiefs of Staff, though now rapidly becoming uncomfortably aware of the German preparations, still refused to believe that the Germans were really serious about invading at all. "Invasion of the United Kingdom," they declared on the 4th September, "would in any event be an immensely formidable undertaking and is becoming increasingly so every day it is probable that Germany would not attempt such a gamble in the immediate future unless she felt that no other course would offer her results in time." 42.

A build-up in the Belgian seaports was noticed next day. There were now 100 barges each at Zeebrugge and Ostend, and 50 motor boats had now arrived at the French port of Boulogne. There was also a consequent decrease in the numbers of barges in the Dutch estuaries and canals, the Terneuzen-Ghent canal and at Antwerp, though in fact several hundred barges still remained at the very large port of the latter town. 43. To the Chiefs of Staff and especially to the Chief of the Naval Staff, Sir Dudley Pound, who had written a memorandum on the subject the previous day, the German barge concentrations in the Belgian ports on 5th September now indicated an acute threat, not to East Anglia, but to the Dover promontary in particular, though diversions might occur elsewhere. The Prime Minister had indeed already drawn the Committee's attention to the security of the peninsula and the threat to the important port of Dover and its command of the Straits. The heavy German air attacks at this time, moreover, were concentrated on the aerodromes of Kent and the Thames estuary during daylight and could be a prelude to an attempt on this area, while the rapid and enthusiastic installation by the Germans of the heavy coastal batteries, which effectively denied the Royal Navy the use of the half of the Straits nearest France, seemed only to amplify the Chiefs of Staff's fear that "the Dover Area is the one part of the coastline where the full effects of our naval strength could not be developed". 44.

42. CAB 66/11, WP(40)362, also COS(40)683 : Future Strategy: Appreciation by the COS Committee, 4 Sept. 1940.

43. CAB 66/11, WP(40)361, also COS(40)716 : Weekly Resumé No. 52, 6 Sept. 1940; & CAB 106/1198: op. cit., 4-5 Sept. 1940.

44. CAB 79/6, COS(40)295th:1, 5 Sept. 1940.

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound's carefully reasoned view is interesting and illustrates well the Naval opinion of where the blow was likely to fall. His argument was based on the assumption that the Germans, "as very practical and experienced makers of war, would not undertake any project which they did not think had at least a reasonable chance of success." The enemy, therefore, must realize that to undertake any landing on the East or South Coasts they would be courting disaster, since they "cannot expect even local naval superiority" for the initial landing, nor could they hope to maintain any lodgement, which had to be almost entirely dependent on seaborne supplies, by protecting the necessary convoys with continual aircraft attack. Only if, perhaps by a surprise attack, the Germans could seize Dover and capture its gun defences, reasoned Admiral Pound, would they be able, by holding both coastlines of the Straights, to be "in a position largely to deny these waters to our naval forces." This done, continued the Admiral, the Germans would be able:

".... to send a stream of craft across from Calais to Dover, with their tanks, guns and everything they require for a full-scale battle, and we in the Navy could not do a great deal to interfere because of the shore guns on both sides, at any rate by day.

All that the country could do then to stop this supply line would be air attack and we know from experience that this is not enough....

We also know that, with the vast quantities of war material which Germany possesses today (compared to which our own material, both existing and prospective, is almost as nothing), if once she could get a solid footing in this country and even a moderately secure supply line, there might really be a prospect of an invasion succeeding. All the experience of the last year has taught us that when material is produced in sufficient quantity, it is an extremely serious matter for another army which is not comparably equipped."

"It is consequently a matter of vital importance to hold this part of the coast," Admiral Pound concluded. Then, referring to the plans of Home Forces for the land defence of the Kingdom, by now much modified by General Brooke, he went on:

".... while in other parts of the coast it may be accepted that our defences on the coast are a 'crust' and the main body of resistance will be found further back, this rule does not apply to the Dover area, which must be held at all costs, and under no conditions could we accept that the Germans get any footing there at all." 45.

45. CAB 80/18, COS(40)711: Invasion: Vital Importance of the Dover Area: Memoranda by the CNS, 4 Sept. 1940.

At the Chiefs of Staff's Meeting on the 5th September, Lieutenant General Paget, replying on General Brooke's behalf to Admiral Pound's insistence that Home Forces should be asked "immediately" to consider this matter "with a view to reinforcements being sent to the Dover area as soon as possible", emphasized the steps already taken to reinforce the South East and the Dover garrison. On the Chiefs of Staff's further insistence that the coast defence artillery at Dover "should be adequately protected by ground troops", however, General Brooke was in fact to move the New Zealand Division to East Kent on the very next day. ⁴⁶.

The Chiefs of Staff were by now keeping a very close eye on developments on the other side of the Channel. Besides examining the photographic and other intelligence, they were also becoming ever more anxious as to the correct interpretation of German intentions against the United Kingdom in the very near future, whether on land, in the air or at sea. Full details of moon and tide conditions and their possible effects on the enemy's plans were also required. Next morning, on 6th September, a very generalised and rather vague report by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee was rejected by the Chiefs of Staff on these very same grounds. The report had merely restated that invasion or raids may be attempted "in the near future"; that successful invasion depended on German sea or air superiority, neither of which was immediately obtainable; that the Germans would, however, employ their greatest effort in an attempt to secure the necessary air superiority and that the Germans "having brought to a high pitch of preparedness their plans for invasion, will not run the risk of a major defeat and consequent loss of prestige" until that air superiority was achieved. ⁴⁷.

Although the Chiefs of Staff Committee agreed that this report "was not what was required", the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee was, in fact, to be correct on all but the first counts. Most notably, although they did not predict the actual nature of the attack, the Sub-Committee, who had prepared their report on the 5th, declared that "the public should be warned to expect an increased scale of air attack in the immediate future". ⁴⁸. Sure enough, London's docks were bombed that same night for the first time and were hit again on the night of the 6th, although this was merely a fore-taste of the devastation yet to come.

46. CAB 79/6, COS(40)295th:1, 5 Sept. 1940.

47. CAB 79/6, COS(40)296th:2, 6 Sept. 1940; & CAB 80/18, COS(40)713(JIC), also JIC(40)268 : Seaborne Invasion of the United Kingdom: Report by the JIC, 5 Sept. 1940.

48. *ibid*.

Meanwhile, air reconnaissance on 6th September had by now established "a definite south-westerly movement towards the Channel ports", combined with a continuation of the decline in numbers of barges seen in the Dutch canals and estuaries, the Belgian canals, except near the coast, and at Antwerp.⁴⁹ For the first time, barges were seen in some numbers in the French Channel ports. At Dunkirk there were now 134 barges in the harbour or the approach canal, whilst a convoy of at least 31 more barges were spotted heading in a westerly direction off the port; at Calais 53 barges had arrived since the 4th September, of a type very similar to a convoy seen off Flushing on that date, and at least 14 small steamers were visible anchored outside the harbour; at Boulogne a total of 61 barges were seen in harbour, with further small craft moving south outside the port, and at Le Havre 15 vessels were seen entering the harbour, very likely only part of a convoy extending out to sea to the north-west. All the barges present were of a self-propelled type of between 130 and 150 feet in length. More barges of this type were seen in the Belgian ports; a total of 213, over 100 more than on the previous day, were in or immediately outside the harbour at Ostend together with 11 small craft and six larger vessels; a further 60 barges and 35 motorboats were in the approach canals to Ostend, while another 100 barges were moored in the canal encircling Bruges. The Zeebrugge-Ghent-Terneuzen canals, by comparison, were by now almost empty. As for other areas, there had been a recent reduction of shipping in Southern Norwegian ports, but ample shipping for a raid or diversion of perhaps divisional strength was still present, while there had been a considerable increase of shipping at Hamburg and unconfirmed movements of a convoy of large transports through the Great Belt of Denmark on the 4th or 5th September.⁵⁰ The Baltic, as ever, remained a largely unknown factor, as did the ports of Western France. While the Chiefs of Staff, however, were to remain largely in touch with these continuing developments, at least one of their advisory bodies, the Invasion Warning Sub-Committee, was very off track and, indeed, seemed to disbelieve evidence that was rapidly becoming almost impossible to interpret wrongly. "There is little evidence other than the movement of small craft towards the Channel ports," it commented on that same day, 6th September, "to show that preparations for

49. CAB 106/1198: op. cit., 6 Sept. 1940.

50. CAB 80/18, COS(40)721(JIC), also JIC(40)273 : Possible German Action against the United Kingdom: Report by the JIC, 7 Sept. 1940.

invasion of the United Kingdom are more advanced than they have been for some time.... If there is an intention to invade, the expedition is being held in readiness in the Baltic or Hamburg." ⁵¹. The Chiefs of Staff, fortunately, were to place far greater reliance on the reports and conclusions of the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee.

By Saturday, 7th September, the threat to the South East from the barges now massing in the Channel ports was becoming very obvious. The day, however, began quietly enough with little more than routine enemy activity in the air. The Chiefs of Staff with General Brooke, meeting at noon, remained concerned about possible German intentions, but took no further action beyond examining a number of recently received telegrams for possible clues and instructing the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee to submit their revised and far more detailed report to them later in the day. ⁵².

Shortly after 4 p.m. that day, however, the first signs of another bomber raid showed on the British radar screens. As the first wave of about 150 bombers crossed the coast at 4.30 p.m., it soon became obvious that their target was not the vital sector stations of Fighter Command that had been hit so often in the last few weeks, but the Capital itself. The British fighter defence was caught off balance and the vast majority of the bombers, followed by a second wave which crossed the coast about 5.20 p.m., were able to create widespread devastation and many civilian casualties, especially in London's docklands and eastern suburbs.

The Chiefs of Staff saw the attack on London, which had not in fact been totally unexpected, although the timing could not have been predicted, as final evidence of a German invasion attempt to be launched in the very near future. Hitler himself, indeed, had declared his intention of razing British cities to the ground in revenge for British bomber raids on Berlin, in a ranting speech at the Sportpalast in Berlin on 4th September, a speech which had ended with the significant words, "He [Hitler] is coming!" Lt.-General Paget, representing General Brooke, was summoned urgently from his Hammersmith headquarters to the Chiefs of Staff's afternoon meeting at 5.30 p.m. on the 7th September, even as bombs were raining down on the capital. Major General Beaumont-Nesbitt, Director of Military Intelligence

51. Fleming, Peter, op. cit., p. 173.

52. CAB 79/6, COS(40)299th:1, 7 Sept. 1940.

at the War Office, was also called to the meeting to give a detailed summary of the very latest intelligence on possible German action against the United Kingdom as interpreted by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee. During the last two months the Germans had been building up their aerodromes in Northern France and had prepared gun emplacements in the Calais area. Four heavy bomber groups had recently been moved into Northern France from Norway and the dive bomber formations had now been moved forward from the areas which they had occupied during the middle of August, presumably for refitting following their mauling earlier in the air struggle. The recent concentration of German air attacks against R.A.F. aerodromes and aircraft factories was clearly seen as an attempt by the Germans to gain early air superiority. Reports, too, had been received that German aircraft had experimented in the laying of artificial smoke clouds which might be used to cover landings or as a diversion, and there were indications that such preparations would be completed within the next two or three days. Restrictions, moreover, had been placed on the movement of civilians in the coastal areas of France and the Low Countries, and there were even reports that inhabitants had been withdrawn from the North Coast of France so that their empty houses might be used to conceal concentrations of enemy troops from roving R.A.F. reconnaissance 'planes. ⁵³.

As to the possible timing of the German invasion, consideration of moonlight and tide conditions showed that these would be at their best between the 8th and 10th September. The most favourable conditions were believed to be a dark sea passage, half light on arrival and a rising tide. The Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee's detailed report, in addition, stated that information had been received from Stockholm of a German expedition to Iceland; "a diversion of this nature is to be anticipated prior to invasion," they commented, while a number of rumours from "secret sources" also emphasized the likelihood of invasion taking place in the first fortnight of September. ⁵⁴. The advanced state of the various German preparations and especially the concentration of barges in the southern North Sea ports during the last ten days and the subsequent southward movement of these same barges during the last three days all tended to support the Sub-Committee's

53. CAB 79/6, COS(40)300th:1, 7 Sept. 1940.

54. CAB 80/18, COS(40)721 (JIC), also JIC(40)273 : Possible German Action against the United Kingdom: Report by the JIC, 7 Sept. 1940.

view. Perhaps the most telling intelligence, however, was the news that leave throughout the German Army was being cancelled on 8th September.

There seemed to be little dispute, therefore, as to the timing of the intended German assault, which was agreed by the Chiefs of Staff to have now become "imminent". Certainly, General Brooke shared the Chiefs of Staff's view on this point, although the Prime Minister still preferred his own opinion that the invasion was more likely to come under cover of fog later in the autumn. "The Chiefs of Staff," he later wrote, "were on the whole of the opinion that invasion was imminent, while I was sceptical and expressed a contrary view." ⁵⁵ On the question of where the invasion would fall, however, the Chiefs of Staff still preferred to keep their options open, despite the new evidence pointing to the South or South East Coasts. The most recent reports, received up to early that same afternoon, the Committee heard, had shown concentrations of barges totalling some 500 in ports from Le Havre to Ostend inclusive, with a total carrying capacity of between 50,000 and 60,000 troops with a proportion of their equipment. More self-propelled barges had moved into the French Channel ports and Ostend, many apparently from the Ostend-Bruges canal, and more convoys moving in a south-westerly direction had been spotted at sea. Some 60 small craft were seen in the canal at Caen alone, while 9 unusual craft that appeared to be rafts about 50' square, with "remarkable powers of manoeuvre", were seen at or near Carteret on the west side of the Cherbourg peninsula. Ominously, too, it was reported that among the many craft in French ports some were being fitted to carry the dreaded dual purpose 88 mm. anti-aircraft and anti-tank gun, together with their tractors and ample supplies of ammunition. The handling of the barges in general, moreover, suggested that they were manned by competent naval crews, while their presence in the Channel ports again suggested an early date for invasion, since these vulnerable craft would not be moved unnecessarily to positions so exposed to R.A.F. bombing attacks, attacks which were not to be long in coming. ⁵⁶

On the face of it, the evidence overwhelmingly seemed to point to what General Brooke had long since warned about, namely a now seemingly imminent descent on the South or South East Coast. The Chiefs of Staff's attention

55. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., p. 405.

56. CAB 79/6, COS(40)300th:1, 7 Sept. 1940; & CAB 106/1198: op. cit., 7 Sept. 1940.

had by now indeed been drawn to this sector, yet at no time did they allow this threat to rate more than equal to the potential threat they already envisaged as existing to the East Anglian Coast. They did not forget that, in the absence of effective seapower, the Germans would almost certainly use their bomber force, particularly the dive bombers, to cover the actual crossing and that these aircraft were all too vulnerable to the British fighters, most especially as the necessary air superiority had not yet been achieved and therefore had to have strong fighter escorts. Twin-engine fighters with their greater range were not available in great enough numbers and had proved to be inferior in quality, too, to the R.A.F.'s single-engine fighters, so single-engine fighters would have to be used to escort the bombers and this limited their effective operating range in daylight to the stretch of coast roughly between The Wash and Southampton. A number of enemy agents, moreover, had been captured within the last few days, including one in Northamptonshire, and three Dutchmen and a German who had landed by rowing boat on the coast of Kent. These had confessed to being spies and had said they were not to make any contacts in England, but were to lie low and be ready at any time in the next fortnight to report not only on the condition of British aerodromes, but also on the movements of British reserve formations in the area of Ipswich-London-Reading-Oxford, an area in which there could be British movements as a response as much to an attack on East Anglia as to an attack on the South East or South Coasts. 57.

The Chiefs of Staff's main fear for the safety of the East Anglian Coast, however, remained the threat they imagined as existing from the North German ports, and in particular from the Baltic, from large ships, perhaps supplemented by the barges and smaller motor vessels even now massing in the Belgian ports. They therefore willingly went along with the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee's appraisal that:

"Recent indications are that the most likely areas to be attacked are from Southwold to Beachy Head. Subsidiary attacks may be expected at other places, while the main expedition is likely to come from Hamburg or the Baltic where shipping is known to be available, though no evidence of an expedition being embarked has yet been obtained.

A Baltic expedition could be launched via the Kiel Canal or the Skaggerak, and it is considered that reconnaissance of the Heligoland Bight and Skaggerak is likely to give the earliest warning of such an expedition and a much needed indication of its point of attack." 58.

57. CAB 79/6, COS(40)300th:1, 7 Sept. 1940.

58. CAB 80/18, COS(40)721(JIC), also JIC(40)273 : op. cit., 7 Sept. 1940.

The substance of the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee's conclusions were reported to the Chiefs of Staff by the Director of Military Intelligence at the important meeting on 7th September, although he clarified the point that the main attack was likely to be carried out by the barges protected by an air umbrella within the Southwold to Beachy Head sector, rather than by large ships sailing directly to the East Coast. Nevertheless, in discussion the Chiefs of Staff made it clear that they were unhappy about air reconnaissance over the Baltic, which was at present carried out at eight hourly intervals, since, "We could not afford to give an expedition nearly eight hours' start from this area." The Air Ministry was instructed to reduce the intervals as well as to step up night reconnaissance of Dutch, Belgian and Northern French coasts by using flares, while the Director of Military Intelligence was also asked to glean what information he could from agents about German troop movements and concentrations on the enemy occupied coastlines, as well as as much information as possible from enemy agents captured in Britain. ⁵⁹.

The upshot of this meeting was that, in view of the acute danger, the defence forces were told to stand by "at immediate notice". The Navy was already at this stage of readiness, while the R.A.F. was at 'alert two' which envisaged a landing within three days. General Brooke had already issued the instruction on the previous night that, "Attack is probable within the next three days." This order had brought Home Forces to eight hours' notice and the troops, in addition, now 'stood to' at dawn and dusk. The Chiefs of Staff agreed to bring Home Forces to the final state of readiness and noted that the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, would "place troops in the Southern and Eastern Commands at immediate notice and warn troops in other Commands that this action had been taken". ⁶⁰. The Ministry of Home Security and other Civil departments were to be informed of the decision and General Brooke, having supervised the final arrangements at his headquarters, was to issue the fateful codeword 'Cromwell' later that evening.

The issue of the final codeword to Home Forces was to bring its own problems. It is interesting, however, to note that the instruction was issued to both Southern and Eastern Commands, that is, not only to formations along the South and South East Coasts, but also to those in East

59. CAB 79/6, COS(40)300th:1, 7 Sept. 1940.

60. *ibid*.

Anglia. This, the most vulnerable part of the East Coast, it seemed, could still not be neglected and valuable formations from Home Forces had to be positioned along the coast and in reserve to guard it, despite the fact that Hitler, although unknown to the British, had no intention of launching a major landing in this sector. Peter Fleming in 'Invasion 1940' states that:

"As long as counter-invasion intelligence remained largely a matter of guesswork, the British tended to guess wrong; but from the moment, in the last days of August, when a body of relevant evidence began to come their way, they interpreted it sensibly and got the answer more or less right." 61.

It does remain in doubt whether the Chiefs of Staff and the Prime Minister, however, despite their attention now being drawn to the South Coast, ever completely got the answer right or at any time, in September 1940, arrived at a perfectly correct forecast of the German strategy. Ever since the shock of the Germans' main attack on France and the Low Countries in May 1940 coming through the 'impassable' Ardennes, the Germans had been expected by all to do that which was most unexpected, and British attitudes, in view of the disastrous consequences of that particular attack for the Allies, hardly surprisingly, were to change only very slowly.

61. Fleming, Peter: op. cit., p. 177.

CHAPTER 11: THE BROOKE PLAN, "CROMWELL" AND AFTER

While the various aspects of the invasion problem were being debated in the highest circles, General Brooke, in the meantime, had not been idle in preparing Home Forces for the expected onslaught. It was a whole month now since, on 6th August, he had declared to the C.I.G.S. and the assembled G.O. C.'s-in-C. Command his intention of making "mobile offensive action" the basis of his plan for the land defence of the Kingdom and of substituting a policy of all-round defence in depth, combined with strong and rapidly moving counter-attacking forces led by tanks and armoured vehicles, to deal with both seaborne and airborne enemy landings, in place of General Ironside's outmoded plans for successive lines of defence set parallel and often far inland from the coast.

In introducing this 'new' policy, he had received the total backing of the Prime Minister, whose ideas on the defence of the Nation on land were very similar to his own. Churchill, indeed, had warned strongly of "the dangers of being unduly committed to systems of passive defence" and strongly emphasized the importance of rapid and vigorous counter-attack in his memorandum on defence against invasion, submitted to the Chiefs of Staff Committee the following day, 7th August. "Should the enemy succeed in landing at various points," the Prime Minister had declared,

"he should be made to suffer as much as possible by local resistance on the beaches, combined with attack from the sea and the air. This forces him to use up his ammunition, and confines him to a limited area. - The defence of any part of the coast must be measured not by the forces on the coast, but by the number of hours within which strong counter-attacks by mobile troops can be brought to bear upon the landing-places. Such attacks should be hurled with the utmost speed and fury upon the enemy at his weakest moment, which is not, as is sometimes suggested, when actually getting out of his boats, but when sprawled upon the shore with his communications cut and his supplies running short. It ought to be possible to concentrate ten thousand men fully equipped within six hours, and twenty thousand men within twelve hours, upon any point where a serious lodgement has been effected."

Then, with a slight twinkle and certainly with General Brooke in mind, he had added,

"The withholding of the reserves until the full gravity of the attack is known, is a nice problem for the Home Command." ¹.

1. CAB 66/10 WI(40)319; also COS(40)604 (Revise), Annexe I: Defence Against Invasion: Note by the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, 5 August 1940.

In the Prime Minister's view, there was "no one more capable" than the man selected to do just this in the event of an invasion, General Brooke.²

Even before the Prime Minister's minute and indeed since the time of his appointment as Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, on 20th July, General Brooke had been thinking along very similar lines. First, however, he had to gain the complete confidence not merely of the Prime Minister, but also of the Chiefs of Staff, as well as of the army commanders now serving under him, and his declaration on the 6th August was partly designed to this end. Before this declaration, in the first days of his appointment he had received some uncomfortably close questioning on matters of Home Defence by the Chiefs of Staff. Such questioning had so recently led to the lack of confidence that had caused General Ironside's replacement. On 26th July, for example, "some doubt was expressed" by the Chiefs of Staff as to "whether the first task of the mobile Army reserves would be to deal with a successful landing by airborne troops or to counter-attack a successful lodgement on the coast." General Brooke, who at this time had only just inherited the dispositions of his predecessor and had had hardly any time as yet to make his own dispositions, could only reply that his reserves,

".... were mainly disposed to afford protection to important ports and to counter-attack enemy forces securing a foothold on the coast in the vicinity of such ports. As a rule, they were also suitably located to deal with airborne landings and a decision as to which of these tasks was the most important could only be made at the time and in the light of events."³

General Brooke had, in fact, already given much thought to countering any German landings by parachute and glider, which were designed to seize objectives in advance of landings by sea in the most vital areas. One such area he felt was a particular worry, though surprisingly, in view of its vulnerability as illustrated by forthcoming developments, it was not the Dover promontory with its vital port. "I was seriously disturbed," he later wrote,

"by the prospect of German airborne landings on the South Downs, to be carried out in combination with landings and destined to prevent the timely arrival of my counter-attacking forces. To guard against such an eventuality, mobile forces such as Brocas Burrows' brigade were retained on the South Downs, ready to deal at once with any airborne landings."⁴

2. Churchill, W. S.: Vol. II, Their Finest Hour, p. 263. Cassell, London, 1949.

3. CAB 79/5 COS(40)235th:1, 26 July 1940.

4. Autobiographical Notes of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, Vol. IV, pp. 229-230.

This latter formation was that of the 1st Motor Machine Gun Brigade, formed in late June and placed on the South Downs by General Ironside. General Brooke immediately supplemented this lightly armed and armoured brigade with a motorized formation of regular infantry, recently redesignated as 29th Infantry Brigade Group. The latter had now completed its equipment and, together with 31st Infantry Brigade Group which joined IV Corps in G.H.Q. Reserve, had been released to the operational control of Home Forces on 1st August. Both Infantry Brigade Groups were organised for rapid counter-attack and were placed directly under Corps control. In the case of 29th Infantry Brigade Group, the controlling body was the headquarters of Lieutenant General Thorne's XII Corps and the brigade, helping to fill the yawning gap in West Sussex left by the departure of Major General Montgomery's 3rd Division on 11th July (see Maps 8 & 9), was soon hard at work training for its allotted task of swiftly moving to repel both sea-borne and airborne enemy landings.⁵

Further anxieties had been aired by the Chiefs of Staff Committee at the end of July. On 29th July the Committee was worried by a report that "gun emplacements along the South Coast were in many cases still too visible and that their camouflage was insufficient". The Air Ministry were duly asked, in consultation with the War Office and General Brooke, to conduct an air reconnaissance of all gun emplacements along the coast with a view to establishing how well, or badly, these emplacements were concealed from above and from seawards at sea level.⁶ Most worrying would be the extreme vulnerability of any poorly camouflaged emplacements to German dive-bombing attacks. Lacking heavy naval vessels for shore bombardment, the Germans were liable to use their dive bombers for subduing the British coastal defences in the locality of a seaborne landing. The Chiefs of Staff, as it happened, were quite correct in this reasoning since this tactic, in fact, featured in the enemy plans for Operation 'Sea Lion'.

As to the effects of enemy dive-bombing attacks on the troops of Home Forces, in general the Chiefs of Staff agreed at this meeting that "experience both in Norway and France had shown that it was the moral rather than the material effect which was the more damaging to troops". From a point

5. WO 166/1: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, G.H.Q. Home Forces, 1 August 1940.

6. CAB 79/5 COS(40)238th:1, 29 July 1940.

of view both as to the morale of the defenders and as a deterrent against the attacking aircraft, experience had also shown that the troops' best defence was the maintenance of "a continuous stream of anti-aircraft fire". Heavy, as well as light, anti-aircraft guns should be used. The Chiefs of Staff considered it "very desirable that all Home Defence troops should be inculcated with this doctrine" and it was decided to bring this point to the notice of both Home Forces and A.D.G.B. and to discover what instructions had been issued to the troops.⁷ In actual fact, General Brooke had already touched on this subject of defence against dive-bombing attacks with the Chiefs of Staff only three days previously. At this earlier meeting he had, in the absence of fighter protection being made available, asked for plentiful mobile light A.A. units to be allocated to protect Home Forces, especially those troops designated for a counter-attacking role.⁸ Now, on 29th July, he was to be asked to instruct his troops to maintain this supposed "continuous stream of anti-aircraft fire" without yet having been given the means to undertake such a task effectively.

This was clearly a very unsatisfactory state of affairs and a few days later, on 5th August, General Brooke was to protest strongly to the Chiefs of Staff that:

"The serious deficiency in light anti-aircraft units was a cause of great concern. Experience in France had shown that these units were necessary on a scale of one regiment of 36 guns per Army Corps. The only light anti-aircraft guns that could at present be made available for co-operation with the whole of the Field Army, were four batteries (a total of 48 guns) which would remain in their present locations, but would be liberated for co-operation with the Field Army when actual invasion seemed imminent."

All too aware that there were far too few such guns available in the country, General Brooke urged the Chiefs of Staff to "weigh up very carefully the relative requirements", since the great majority of these guns were used for the protection of vital industries.⁹ A week later he again stressed the need of light anti-aircraft guns to be allocated as soon as possible to Home Forces on a strength of one regiment per Army Corps. Already some personnel were being trained for manning Bofers guns in a mobile role, yet the weapons themselves were still to remain in their static A.D.G.B. role. Field Army units deployed for home defence, he declared,

7. *ibid.*

8. CAB 79/5 COS(40)235th:1, 26 July 1940.

9. CAB 79/5 COS(40)247th:1, 5 August 1940.

".... would require the co-operation of light anti-aircraft units in the same way as the B.E.F. had required them, and the time had come when the importance of protecting factories from low-flying attack would have to be weighed up against the importance of protecting the troops that protect the factories from invasion."

The Chiefs of Staff, however, did nothing beyond asking the Vice Chiefs of Staff Committee to "consider" the matter with a view to an allocation of light anti-aircraft guns from future production. ¹⁰.

It was not until the 3rd September that the Chiefs of Staff Committee again discussed this matter. The Vice Chiefs had suggested that a monthly allocation from new production of two batteries (24 guns) be made to Home Forces, starting in September, giving a total of four regiments or 144 guns by the end of February 1941. ¹¹. The Deputy Chiefs of Staff's Anti-Aircraft Sub Committee, on the other hand, had pointed out the insufficiency of light and heavy anti-aircraft guns currently with A.D.G.B.. Major General S. C. M. Archibald from Headquarters, Home Forces, representing General Brooke at this meeting, again put forward the arguments of Home Forces. The C.-in-C., Home Forces, he said,

".... wished to emphasize that under present arrangements no anti-aircraft guns were completely at his disposal and that he was most anxious that at least some light anti-aircraft guns should be placed under his command. The success which the enemy had achieved in France could be largely attributed to the use by the enemy of his dive bombers, and, as a safeguard against a repetition of a similar experience in the event of invasion, the C.-in-C., Home Forces, was anxious to press for an allocation of light anti-aircraft guns on the scale of rising ultimately to two regiments per Corps." ¹².

The pleas of Home Forces, however, continued to be overruled by the Chiefs of Staff. Discussing the matter, the Chiefs of Staff referred to a similar plea for anti-aircraft guns made by General Ironside as long ago as 14th July, which had been rejected for a variety of reasons. It had been considered then that the conditions regarding the protection of Home Forces against the attentions of dive bombers were totally different from the conditions which the B.E.F. had had to operate under. The fighter protection which would be given by A.D.G.B. was considerably stronger and capable of more efficient control than that which had existed in France.

10. CAB 79/6 COS(40)260th:2, 12 August 1940.

11. CAB 80/17 COS(40)692: Allocation of A.A. Equipment: Memo by V.C.I.G.S., 31 August 1940.

12. CAB 79/6 COS(40)293rd:1, 3 September 1940.

Home Forces were not dependent on semi-advanced bases and their rear areas would conform in nearly all cases to the areas already defended by the heavy guns of A.D.G.B.. The B.E.F., moreover, had had to operate without the advantage of an elaborate and highly organised warning system linked to a circular air defence, such as existed in Britain under A.D.G.B., and their flank had been exposed. Home Forces, too, would not really have need of anti-aircraft guns until the German dive bombers were attacking in force, a state of affairs that would not be reached until the enemy had established a firm foothold in this country. The latter, in turn, would not happen unless the R.A.F. lost command of the air; and the protection of the vital aircraft factories, fighter stations and R.D.F. stations needed to keep the R.A.F. fighting effectively, was at present the most important task of the anti-aircraft defence throughout the country. With the limited numbers of A.A. guns held by A.D.G.B. even now, the withdrawal of but a few guns from these vital tasks for use by Home Forces might be fatal and, moreover, would not satisfy the full air defence requirements of the widespread units of Home Forces by a long way.

With only so many A.A. guns available, it was most important of all, the Chiefs of Staff maintained, that all guns should be kept under a single authority. This was the fundamental conception of A.D.G.B., in that it provided a defence umbrella for the whole country, under the command of the A.O. C.-in-C. Fighter Command, Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, who was thus in the unique position of viewing the picture of the air defence requirements of the country as a whole. He was charged with the responsibility for providing, as and when required, defence against enemy air attack at whatever point it might be launched and, under existing arrangements, the whole of the A.A. resources of the country were under his command for this purpose. This responsibility would automatically carry with it the provision of A.A. defence against dive-bombing attacks directed against Home Forces. Thus, if the circumstances demanded, it would be for the A.O. C.-in-C. Fighter Command to transfer, at his discretion, such mobile A.A. equipments as might be necessary for the defence of military forces engaging the enemy on the beaches or inland. ^{13.}

All in all, the Chiefs of Staff declared at their 3rd September meeting,

13. *ibid.* and CAB 79/5 COS(40)221st:1, 14 July 1940.

".... with the extremely limited resources of anti-aircraft guns at our disposal, it would be unthinkable that such guns should be withdrawn from the front line in which they were at present fully engaged, to meet a hypothetical situation of invasion which might never arise." 14.

The Chiefs of Staff, therefore, refused to alter their decision of 14th July that no heavy or light A.A. guns would be allocated specifically to the command of Home Forces at the present time. The troops would have to continue to rely for protection against enemy aircraft on the general umbrella provided by A.D.G.B. under the single and central control of the A.O. C.-in-C. Fighter Command. The A.A. protection of the troops would remain an integral part of the latter's responsibility, although the A.O. C.-in-C. was "invited to bear in mind, in deploying new light anti-aircraft defences, the possible requirements of Home Forces". 15.

The matter, though, did not rest there. On 11th September, the C.I.G.S., General Dill, succeeded in persuading the Chiefs of Staff Committee to invite the C.A.S. to examine the possibility of making a few Bofors guns available to Home Forces for training with field units "as a secondary role to the defence of vital points", since he felt "no doubt that the enemy would try to prevent the movement of our reserves by the large-scale use of dive bombers" and that "the allocation of even a token number of light anti-aircraft guns would make a considerable difference". 16. The same day, however, Churchill's War Cabinet also touched on this matter, while discussing the defence of the Dover promontory, and hearing that General Brooke was "very anxious to get a regiment of Bofors guns", immediately proceeded to authorise a plain directive to the A.O. C.-in-C. Fighter Command to provide a regiment of 36 Bofors guns for the defence of the troops in the North Foreland - Dungeness sector of East Kent against attack by low-flying aircraft. 17.

The directive, issued by the Air Ministry on the War Cabinet's behalf and without any reference to the Chiefs of Staff Committee, not surprisingly greatly upset Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, who quickly submitted a formal protest to the Air Ministry against the directive and even went so far as to point out to the Sub Committee on the Allocation of Active Air Defence that "he would find it difficult to exercise his responsibilities if

14. CAB 79/6 COS(40)293rd:1, 3 September 1940.

15. ibid. and CAB 79/5 COS(40)221st:1, 14 July 1940.

16. CAB 79/6 COS(40)305th:1, 11 September 1940.

17. CAB 65/15 WM(40)247th:3, 11 September 1940.

similar directions were issued in future". The Sub Committee, too, protested strongly in a memorandum to the Chiefs of Staff on 27th September that:

"In order to carry out this direction, it was necessary to withdraw the guns from places of vital importance.... We feel it right to invite the attention of the Chiefs of Staff to the implications of this withdrawal of light anti-aircraft guns with a view to consideration being given to the cancelling of this direction."

The case of Harwich caused the Sub Committee the greatest concern:

"In order to find the 36 guns, it has been necessary to remove the 12 Bofors guns previously deployed at Harwich, and the Admiralty have invited our attention to the risks which this involves. Two flotillas of destroyers, a number of corvettes, two flotillas of M.T.B.s and some submarines are at present based on Harwich for anti-invasion duties. The Admiralty point out that if, due to the absence of adequate defences against low-flying aircraft, a destroyer were to be sunk in the harbour, Harwich might be temporarily blocked; and as Harwich is the only base between Dover and the Humber where cruisers and destroyers can re-ammunition and oil, this might have very serious results on our Naval operations, should an invasion be launched." 18.

The Chiefs of Staff, however, probably all too well aware that the weight of the Prime Minister was behind the Air Ministry's direction, agreed the next day that the allocation of the 36 Bofors guns to Home Forces (which had by now been made) should stand and that the 12 guns withdrawn from Harwich should be replaced immediately from new production. The other guns taken from A.D.G.B. would be similarly replaced as soon as possible and the possibility of a token monthly allocation of new Bofors guns to Home Forces for training purposes was to be considered. 19.

After much debate, therefore, General Brooke had eventually received the first of the regiments of Bofors guns that he had originally asked for and the regiment was quite correctly allocated to the particularly vulnerable sector held by XII Corps, where it would be invaluable in covering the movements of the reserve formations, especially those of VII Corps, in the event of an enemy invasion of the South East. It would be a very long time, however, before the allocation of one light anti-aircraft regiment per Army Corps, let alone the ultimate goal of two regiments per Corps could be made.

18. CAB 80/19 COS(40)786; also DCOS(AA)182: Withdrawal of Bofors Guns to Provide LAA Defences for Home Forces: Memo by the Sub Committee on the Allocation of Active Air Defences, 27 September 1940.

19. CAB 79/7 COS(40)328th:3, 28 September 1940.

In the meantime, the movements of reserves within any other Corps area in the Country would lack sufficient light anti-aircraft protection. In the open country of East Anglia, in particular, such vulnerability of reserves, especially armoured reserves, to enemy dive bombing might have had a critical and perhaps disastrous effect on possible mobile operations to counter any enemy attack. In late October, General Brooke was allocated a further battery of twelve Bofors, but these were granted for the specific purpose of forming a "travelling circus" of mobile light anti-aircraft guns to afford some protection, or at least act as a deterrent to enemy aircraft engaged in low-level accurate daylight bombing raids on selected towns in the South East. The guns were to surprise the enemy with concentrated anti-aircraft fire at places thought to be undefended and the scheme was to have some success.²⁰ The regular allocation of light anti-aircraft guns to Home Forces from new production, on the other hand, was to come to little until the following year. As late as 23rd December, General Brooke complained to the Chiefs of Staff that he had expected to receive about eight Bofors guns a month, but had actually received only two guns over the entire three months from the end of September. All in all it was a very slow process of allocation for a piece of military equipment that General Brooke considered "vitally important" if the mobile, and especially the armoured, divisions "were to play their part in repelling invasion".²¹ Bearing in mind the havoc wrought by Allied ground attack and rocket-firing aircraft on the German armoured reserves in Normandy later in the War, it can be seen that General Brooke certainly had a point.

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The importance of the formations of Home Forces placed in mobile reserve had at no time been lost on the capable mind of the C.-in-C., Home Forces. One of the Chiefs of Staff's many worries at the end of July had been,

".... that the permanent road blocks which had been constructed at various points along the South Coast and elsewhere as obstructions against invasion might, in certain circumstances, have the opposite effect of acting as a brake on the passage of our own reinforcements." ²².

20. CAB 79/7 COS(40)348th:1, 14 October 1940; and COS(40)362nd:1, 28 Oct. 1940.

21. CAB 79/8 COS(40)436th:1, 23 December 1940.

22. CAB 79/5 COS(40)238th:1, 29 July 1940.

General Brooke, in fact, had already foreseen this possibility and had, in the first few days following his accession to the post of C.-in-C., Home Forces, taken the necessary steps to ensure that the greater part of these permanent roadblocks, one of the more unfortunate results of General Ironside's defensive thinking, should be removed forthwith. The Chiefs of Staff were quickly reassured that the process of removal was already in hand. General Brooke later wrote:

"Another form of defence which I found throughout the country and with which I was in total disagreement consisted of massive concrete roadblocks at the entry and exit of most towns and of many villages. I had suffered too much from these blocks in France not to realize their crippling effect on mobility. Our security must depend on the mobility of our reserves, and we were taking the very best steps to reduce this mobility.... I stopped any further constructions and instructed existing ones to be removed where possible." 23.

General Brooke had also taken prompt action on a further potential impediment to the smooth passage of the movement of reserves. In the past two months bridges, notorious choke points to military movements by road at the best of times, had been prepared for demolition all over the country, at first to no easily recognisable overall plan. In some cases these bridges additionally carried important telephone and telegraph lines essential for R.A.F. and Naval communications. In response to their concern over this matter, the Chiefs of Staff were told on 31st July that,

".... Headquarters, Home Forces, were already taking steps to reduce the danger of the premature demolition of important bridges, as such action might easily do more harm than good by restricting the mobility of our reserves.... Arrangements could be made to deviate the cables." 24.

By the 9th August, General Brooke had completed his inspection of the coastline and was able to concentrate his attention on the formations in reserve. ".... I discussed the role they were to play in the event of invasion and inspected units and formations to assess their value in the event of an attack," he later wrote. 25. He commenced that day with an inspection of that most important formation for counter-attack in the South East, Lieutenant General MacNaughton's VII or 'Canadian' Corps, comprising

23. Autobiographical Notes of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke; and Bryant, Arthur, The Turn of the Tide, 1939-1943, p. 198, Cassell, London, 1957.

24. CAB 79/5 COS(40)241st:1, 31 July 1940.

25. Bryant, Arthur: op. cit. pp. 200-201.

1st Armoured Division, 1st Canadian Division, 2nd New Zealand Division and 1st Army Tank Brigade, which was situated in the Surrey area. Still in G.H.Q. Reserve with all troops under its command at eight hours' notice to move, and with its primary task being to counter-attack and destroy any enemy forces invading the counties of Surrey, Kent, Sussex or Hampshire as far as the River Itchen which had escaped the attentions of the troops of Lieutenant General Thorne's XII Corps and Lieutenant General Montgomery's V Corps, VII Corps had received revised operational instructions on 3rd August. The latter had divided its area of possible operations into three areas; that of Kent and East Sussex, from Sheerness to Beachy Head, which would necessitate a forward concentration in the area of Tonbridge-Staplehurst-Hawkhurst-Hartfield before offensive operations could be undertaken; and that of the South Downs from Beachy Head to Littlehampton, and of the Portsmouth area from Littlehampton to Winchester, to which the Corps was detailed to deploy direct from its present location in Surrey. In all cases contact with the enemy was to be preceded by road moves, with the possible exception of 1st Army Tank Brigade which might be ordered to move by rail. Parallel road routes, two per division, with alternatives if necessary, had already been selected, reconnoitred and movements were now being repeatedly practised so as to avoid confusion and maximise rapid deployment. Starting points, timing, speeds and densities of traffic, and traffic control arrangements, including the necessity of keeping the roads clear of civilian traffic, had all been worked out with care.²⁶ Even so, despite all this preparation and practice by the best equipped and most powerful counter-attacking force in the Country (at least relatively), General Brooke, having discussed "the development of the Corps in its 'Rescue Role'" with its commander, soon discovered that there was still much more work on its training to be done, especially in its battlefield role, as he was soon being forced to "try to counteract a slow and sticky envelopment" while watching units of the Corps on manoeuvres.²⁷ He most likely also noted the unduly long time it would take VII Corps to deploy its strength for counter-attack in the event of a German landing in East Kent. (See Map 9.)

General Brooke was also looking ahead. In a long letter to Sir Edward Grigg, Under Secretary of State for War, submitted next day, 10th August, he outlined his proposals for future long-term policy on home defence. The

26. WO 166: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, VII Corps, August 1940: VII Corps Operational Instruction No. 3, 3 August 1940.

27. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 9 August 1940.

draft of this important letter had already been discussed at the Army Council Room Conference four days earlier. "Following the collapse of France and the return of the B.E.F. to the United Kingdom," he wrote,

"our whole attention and energies had to be directed to the reorganisation and re-equipment of the B.E.F. and to the immediate needs of home defence.

We are now in a position to look ahead and to consider a longer term policy which must be largely based under the plans of the Chiefs of Staff for the future conduct of the war. I hope that it may be found possible to initiate this policy by the end of October."

He again emphasized the importance of mobile counter-offensive operations:

"It is not possible to be strong everywhere on the many hundreds of miles of coastline of Great Britain, and at the numerous places where the enemy may attempt to land troops from the air. Reliance, therefore, has to be placed mainly upon mobile columns trained and equipped to take vigorous and rapid counter-offensive action against any enemy who may succeed in setting foot in this country. This role will be undertaken by some of the existing infantry divisions and the two armoured divisions of the Field Army in Great Britain."

The divisions other than those in G.H.Q. Reserve, however, still largely lacked their second-line transport, especially that for troop-carrying, and third-line transport was only being provided for the armoured divisions. General Brooke continued,

"All the infantry divisions require to be made up to a degree of mobility depending on their location, and I estimate that the provision of troop carrying or coach companies to an average of two such companies per division will be necessary." 28.

The static defence of the beaches was to take very much a second place after the counter-attacking forces. As to the infantry defending the beaches, General Brooke continued in his letter,

"The method of providing the static defence of beaches will depend on the number of units which can be placed at my disposal in addition to the existing Field Formations.

It is realized that for a period of two or three months no additional trained personnel will be available."

28. WO 166/1: op. cit., August 1940, Appendix B: C.-in-C.'s letter to the War Office, 10 August 1940.

Subsequently, however, 60 new infantry battalions, already brigaded in groups of four battalions - 59 Holding Battalions (excluding three Guards and one machine-gun Holding Battalion), and 15 Pioneer Battalions, already with divisions - would have completed their initial training and would be capable of carrying out an operational role. General Brooke planned to employ as many of these 134 new battalions, organised into Independent Brigades of three, four or even five battalions, depending on the locality in which they were employed, for the static defence of beaches "in order to relieve the existing Field Army formations and enable them to train." ²⁹. The new Independent Brigades were to be given some sort of provision of R.E., R.A., R.A.S.C. and other ancillary units, though, in fact, lack of manpower and equipment was to mean that by November, when these Independent Brigades were largely formed into seven (later nine) County Divisions with an establishment of 10,000 all ranks, instead of the 15,500 allotted to the field divisions, they actually possessed very little artillery or transport. These proposed formations of large numbers of low category troops, nevertheless, when ready were highly suited to guarding the beaches over the winter and into 1941 and to maintain and camouflage the almost completed beach defences on the most exposed coasts. They were to perform a valuable role in releasing the better troops of Field Army formations from this task, so that they could at last have a chance of a thorough training in modern mobile warfare. ³⁰.

General Brooke continued to enjoy the wholehearted support of the Prime Minister in his policy. Winston Churchill was also highly pleased to learn from the Chiefs of Staff's letter of 13th August, replying to the Prime Minister's minute on scales of defence against invasion, that:

"The C.-in-C. assures us that the paramount importance of immediate counter-attack upon the enemy, should he obtain a temporary footing on these shores, has been impressed on all ranks, and that it is his policy to bring back divisions into reserve as soon as they are adequately trained and equipped for offensive operations."

He noted, in addition, that the Chiefs of Staff found themselves "in complete agreement" with the Prime Minister's and the C.-in-C., Home Forces's, views on this matter. ³¹. Only a few days later, on 23rd August, Churchill was again stressing the importance of having "as large a proportion as possible of highly trained troops in mobile reserve", this time to the Secretary of

29. *ibid.*

30. Collier, Basil: History of the Second World War: The Defence of the United Kingdom, pp. 229-230, H.M.S.O., London, 1957.

31. CAB 66/10 WP(40)319; also COS(40)604 (Revise): Annexe II: Defence Against Invasion: Reply by the C.C.S., 13 August 1940.

State for War at a War Cabinet meeting. Already the Prime Minister wanted particulars of the progress made with the formation and training of General Brooke's new battalions, although his enthusiasm most likely got the better of him when he suggested that the Secretary of State, Anthony Eden, "should consider moving the 1st Division from the coastal area into mobile reserve". The Secretary of State undertook that this last point would be considered, but diplomatically did not add that troop movements such as this were entirely at the discretion of the C.-in-C., Home Forces. ³².

The success of this policy now being implemented by General Brooke, as he had stated in his letter to the War Office, had wider implications for the future continuation of the War. The Chiefs of Staff stressed as well the vital importance of securing the United Kingdom against both invasion and air attack, so as to maintain her war effort at the highest level, and of securing her sea communications with America and the Empire, while maintaining military and civilian morale, and emphasized its long-term implications in an appreciation on future strategy on 4th September:

"Defence against invasion employs today a very large number of active divisions, which are in varying stages of training and equipment. Our policy must be to improve our static defences and hasten the raising and training of our Home Defence and Home Guard units in order to release troops of the field army. Eventually, as our defences and air power become more effective, and as the divisions receive their full equipment, and as the threat recedes, it will be possible to reduce the present number of divisions on Home Defence duties and employ them elsewhere.

At the same time, invasion is a contingency in respect of which we cannot afford to take risks, and to meet it we must always keep a proportion of active formations in the United Kingdom." ³³.

General Brooke, in the meantime, was having to consider more immediate problems. Certain other points requiring immediate attention were outlined in his letter of 10th August to the War Office. Some 9,000 newly trained personnel were required to man the static artillery now in position or in the course of being installed, either for beach defence or astride the main avenues of approach inland, so as to release a similar number of personnel from Field Army formations who were at present manning these guns, pending issue to the formations of their proper equipment. Further personnel had to be found to guard vulnerable points, especially aerodromes, and to provide

32. CAB 65/8 WM(40)233rd:2, 23 August 1940.

33. CAB 66/11 WP(40)362; also COS(40)683: Future Strategy: Appreciation by the COS Committee, 4 September 1940.

Home Forces with winter accommodation. Air Force squadrons were required to act and be trained "in full and intimate co-operation with the Field Army". He outlined an urgent need for squadrons of dive bombers to be placed at his disposal and for an improved type of tactical reconnaissance aircraft. Intercommunication between ground and air needed to be further studied and "brought to the pitch of efficiency which it appears to have reached in the German Army". There were also organisational and administrative matters to be improved, such as that of training centres, pioneer and special units, the transport, ammunition, medical and traffic control situation, and the continued demands for more staff from headquarters to cope with increasing paperwork. ³⁴.

One particular area of concern for General Brooke was that of the 'Home Guard', as they had been officially renamed on 23rd July, following Winston Churchill's objection that the word 'local' in 'Local Defence Volunteers' was "uninspiring". ³⁵. The new name had been an obvious improvement. "What a difference that change made to the esprit de corps of that gallant company of veterans," the then Major General Ismay later recalled, although Major General Pownall, Inspector General of the Home Guard, was not so complimentary, saying,

"The change of title from Local Defence Volunteers to Home Guard is purely Winstonian and is a great nuisance. He could have left things alone. But 'Home Guard' rolls better off the tongue and makes a better headline." ³⁶.

Numbering over 1,300,000 volunteers by early August, of which about half were now armed with rifles, mainly thanks to American help, they had at first received denim overalls as uniforms to replace their original 'L.D.V.' brassards. With not enough denims to go round, however, the War Cabinet was forced to authorise the issue of serge battle dress on 14th August and eventually the whole of the Home Guard were to be issued with battle dress. ³⁷. But the issue of weapons, uniforms and other scarce equipment to the Home Guard worried General Brooke. "Priority should now be given to the regular forces and steps taken without delay to prevent the diversion of resources to the Home Guard at the expense of the former," he wrote to Sir Edward Grigg on 10th August. He also expressed his concern as to their role:

34. WO 166/1: op. cit., August 1940, Appendix B: op. cit., 10 August 1940.

35. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., p. 148.

36. Ismay, General the Lord: Memoirs, p. 187, Heinemann, London, 1960; and Diaries of Lieutenant General Sir Henry R. Pownall, 29 July 1940.

37. CAB 65/8 WM(40)226th:4, 14 August 1940.

"The role of the Home Guard has been clearly defined as that of local and static defence on a voluntary, part-time basis; there is, however, at the present time a strong tendency to go beyond this and to employ Home Guard on full time duties prior to invasion, which necessarily involves questions of pay, administration and transport.

I feel strongly that the original role of the Home Guard should be adhered to, that they should not be required to undertake full time duties except in the case of invasion, nor should they be paid, and that any Home Guard who is not otherwise employed and is therefore available for full time duties should enlist as a soldier into a home defence unit." 38.

Despite his misgivings over some matters, nevertheless, General Brooke remained generally happy with the continuing growth and improvement of this volunteer force. "The Home Guard was making good progress and was co-operating well with units of the regular army," he had been able to report to the Chiefs of Staff a few days previously. "It should prove very valuable in manning strong points in the rear of forward defences." 39.

Major General Henry Pownall as Inspector General, on the other hand, was more in touch with the everyday problems of organising and equipping the Home Guard countrywide. Wrestling, especially early on, with "a rare dog's dinner" of such problems, the groundwork had none the less been successfully laid by the end of June. Certain Home Guard officers, "indifferent personnel who got office by patronage or otherwise in the first instance" and who "now constitute a 'vested interest'", the practicalities of providing round-the-clock protection for the multitude of local 'Vulnerable Points' with a purely part-time force, local jealousies and rivalries, the muddles caused by over-hasty or inefficient distribution of weapons and equipment, and the chronic lack of steel helmets and of small-arms ammunition for training purposes - "We do need five rounds per man just to feel the kick of the rifles" - these were just some of the many problems that abounded at the time. 40. Yet it was the enthusiasm and good will of the majority that carried the Home Guard forward and largely overcame the problems. Major General Pownall wrote towards the end of July,

"In the main, things are going well, but it all depends on the initiatives and capacity of the local people. Where there are failures, it is local incompetence. Good men have been able, in every instance, to overcome the admittedly great difficulties in the formation of the L.D.V.. And the lower one goes down, the greater the enthusiasm, a very healthy sign. That

38. WO 166/1: op. cit., August 1940, Appendix B: op. cit., 10 August 1940.

39. CAB 79/5 COS(40)247th:1, 5 August 1940

40. Diaries of Lieutenant General Sir Henry R. Pownall, 20 June - 8 July 1940.

spirit will want keeping up, not only by the provision of equipment, but by defeating the boredom which may ensue if nothing comes of Hitler's threats. However, that gentleman may solve the boredom problem at any time. At present it is well in the background.... But my chief anxiety is lest we get too large. We are within sight of equipping and arming these people properly in their present numbers, and the organisation is taking shape well - there is now established a proper chain of Command, control and administration. If we grow too fast, there is a grave risk of disorganisation and muddle all over again. I hope very much, and have pressed strongly, that we should expand only as our equipment resources make it reasonable to do so.... We do not want to go back to the chaos of a month ago." 41.

Numbers, in fact, grew more slowly during August, although the strength of the Home Guard had exceeded the 1,500,000 mark by early September. Yet for all their large numbers, the Home Guard would always be a countrywide force and have its greatest concentration of units in the urban areas. In the event of an enemy invasion, only the local Home Guard units in that particular area would be involved and if a German invasion came in the South East, for example, the fighting would be all but over by the time Home Guard units in the South West, Midlands, North, Wales and Scotland would have a chance to fire a shot. While in the most rural areas, the Home Guard units might be very widely spread. Nor, at least in the earlier days, would local Home Guards be much of a match for Germany's highly trained and battle experienced parachute troops! Even so, organised to fight in the vicinity of their homes, they provided a national network of defended villages, parishes and townships, not unlike the web of a spider, which would hamper the consolidation of enemy troops landed from the air and impede the advance of enemy ground troops wherever in the country the enemy came ashore or advanced inland. Home Guards would reinforce the static defences near the coast, would largely man the inland 'stop lines' now shorn of regular troops by General Brooke, would patrol and give warnings of enemy airborne landings, would act as local guides to the regular forces, would help protect vulnerable points against attack or sabotage by Fifth Columnists or enemy airborne troops, and would free regular troops from all these and many other, manpower-consuming tasks. Used properly, whether fighting from prepared defensive positions, soon also to include 'nodal points' and 'anti-tank islands' inland, whether carrying out surprise attacks and ambushes against small parties of the enemy, whether acting as observers, guides, scouts or messengers, or, later on, whether forming local motorized detachments equipped with motor cars, motorcycles, bicycles or even improvised armoured cars, the Home Guard would henceforth form a valuable adjunct to the regular forces.

41. Diaries of Lieutenant General Sir Henry R. Pownall, 20 July 1940.

The problems would never entirely disappear. John Brophy, author of 'The Home Guard Handbook', one of the Home Guard's first training instruction books and of many subsequent publications on the Home Guard, regarded one of the chief problems as simply being "over-enthusiasm, charging up to the muzzles of the 'enemy'".⁴² The problem, too, of the 'status' both of the Home Guard and of its officers was a growing one. The voluntary, auxiliary, part-time status was not in fact changed until November 1941, when conscription was introduced to keep the Home Guard up to strength, although 'county' titles, shoulder flashes, cap badges and the first rank badges were introduced on 3rd August 1940.⁴³ Major General Pownall noted that August, however, that,

"The status of officer ranks is a troublesome question and now a very active one. The relationships between commanders of the Regular (and Territorial) forces and of the Home Guard needs to be cleared up. It is being raised everywhere I go, for the Home Guard officers need to know where they stand."

On 27th August, Major General Pownall recalled that the 'status of officers' question was dealt with by the Secretary of State in the House of Commons, but that the outcome was that they were "given no status at all". Pownall blamed the "negative attitude of many at the War Office who regarded the Home Guard as a nuisance". On 2nd September he noted that the problem still "rages".⁴⁴ The next day, however, the Prime Minister himself raised the 'status' question at a meeting of the Defence Committee (Operations) at No. 10 Downing Street. Churchill,

".... stressed the importance of giving the Home Guard a clearly defined status as part of the authorised and regular forces of the Crown. If this were done, there would be no danger of the Home Guard being taken for franc-tireurs. It might be advisable to issue a Royal Proclamation so that the force would be completely legal in every respect. Certain points needed consideration, for example the introduction of ranks for the officers and of saluting."

The Secretary of State was duly invited to examine the status of the Home Guard once again, "with a view to regularising the position of this valuable force".⁴⁵ Three days later, on 6th September, the War Cabinet heard

42. Liddall Hart Papers: 1/112/35, Letter from John Brophy to BHLH, 15 August 1940.

43. Longmate, Norman: The Real Dads' Army: The Story of the Home Guard, p. 45, Arrow, London, 1974.

44. Diaries of Lieutenant General Sir Henry R. Pownall, 27 August and 2 September 1940.

45. CAB 69/1 DO(40)30th:2, 3 September 1940.

that the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State "were in consultation as to the desirability of giving a more regular status to the Home Guard". 46.

By September, too, uniforms were reaching the Home Guard in quantity, "such quantity that the Home Guard complain that they are being choked with stuff," although there remained a desperate shortage of steel helmets. A coherent training policy, together with authority for the Home Guard to take up indoor accommodation for winter drill purposes had also become a priority, while later in the month the withdrawal of some 300,000 Service .303 rifles and their replacement by the .300 American Springfield rifles and some Browning light automatic rifles created inevitable problems. Major General Pownall was especially scathing about the training situation:

"The attitude of G.H.Q., Home Forces, towards the Home Guard has improved since Brooke's arrival.... The truth now is that G.H.Q., Home Forces, and the War Office 'don't get on'. This hit the Home Guard particularly in training matters. G.H.Q. won't let the War Office produce anything in the way of training instructions, whether by official pamphlets or by guidance through the Press. At the same time G.H.Q. produces nothing itself, and so nothing happens - except that the Press produce their own ideas, which are only too apt to be a nuisance. Brooke and Paget are not a good combination; moreover, Brooke was always 'a one' for quarrelling with the formation above him. Paget is not one likely to smooth over this characteristic. It is a pity." 47.

There is further evidence that Major General Pownall and General Brooke himself did not always see eye to eye on Home Guard matters. General Brooke, who had seen Pownall a few days previously on 17th August, afterwards commented in his own diary that Major General Pownall's account of his activities does "not impress me very much". 48.

Nevertheless, by September, the newly formed battalions of 'Sunday soldiers', as their critics disparagingly called them, were now integrated into defence plans for every locality. Most now had a uniform, even if it were only ill-fitting denims, together with caps and boots of odd sizes from the Army's surplus stocks. Their morale, however, was high. The few months of waiting since May had been put to good use as far as training was concerned with nightly instruction in weapons, patrolling and fieldcraft, and

46. CAB 65/9 WM(40)344th:4, 6 September 1940.

47. Diaries of Lieutenant General Sir Henry R. Pownall, 2 September and 27 August 1940.

48. Diaries of Field Marshall Viscount Alanbrooke, 17 August 1940.

platoon or inter-platoon exercises on Sundays; while in the South East and East Anglia at least, few Home Guards, whatever their deficiencies in training or equipment, would now, thanks largely to the American rifles, have to confront the German invaders totally unarmed. The Chiefs of Staff heard on 10th September that,

"The Home Guard was gradually sorting itself out. There was a strong demand for instruction by members of the Regular Army and the Home Guard detachments which found themselves alongside the Regular Units were making good progress. There was still some unnecessary delay at road blocks to the passage of ambulances and rescue parties during air raid warnings, but steps had been taken to eliminate this trouble." 49.

The changes, now discussed by the Defence Committee and spurred on by the Prime Minister, began to take place in November, by which month the strength of the Home Guard had risen to 1,700,000 volunteers. Already at the end of September, the Home Guard's Inspector General, Major General Henry Pownall, had been replaced in his post by Major General T. Ralph ('Rusty') Eastwood, who had hitherto commanded the 4th (Regular) Division on the South Coast. The Home Guard had by now grown far larger than was originally intended. Much of its strength was within the built-up areas and it was expected to deal even with enemy tanks. The original concept of it as a rural-based, small, but widespread force of part-timers, whose function was principally to cope only with lightly armed airborne troops and fifth columnists, was now long outmoded. What amounted to a drastic reorganization, therefore, was announced in two speeches by the Under Secretary of State for War, Sir Edward Grigg, in the House of Commons on 6th and 19th November. The Home Guard, "which has hitherto been largely provisional in character," was to be given "a firmer and more permanent shape" as befitted its greatly increased size and responsibilities, and yet it was intended not to alter its voluntary, auxiliary, part-time character. It would, the Minister promised, now be given a fixed organisation, though "without too much formality or what is called red tape". Major General Eastwood was to be appointed as the Home Guard's first Director General, with his own staff at the War Office, responsible to the C.-in-C., Home Forces, General Brooke. As Director General, Eastwood had authority to issue orders, unlike Pownall who as Inspector General could only advise and had had to suffer orders issued from the Army Council at the War Office, with all the delay and confusion that had entailed. A full-time officer, receiving an allowance, would be installed to combine the duties of adjutant and quartermaster in each

battalion. There would be proper arrangements to cover out-of-pocket expenses, although the Home Guard would remain unpaid. The second great change announced by Sir Edward Grigg was the introduction into the Home Guard of proper military ranks, with the granting of commissions to Home Guard officers, who would be entitled to be saluted and called 'sir', although unlike Regular Army officers they would not have powers of summary punishment. Especially welcome, in view of some of the criticism of the early appointments of officers, was the appointment of an independent Selection Board to examine all existing and future officers. The granting of commissions on the basis of an officer's ability to command the confidence of all ranks, and regardless of political, business or social affiliations, was greatly to improve the Home Guard's discipline and training. Finally, to sweeten the pill, the provision of better weapons, uniforms and training, and a reduction in routine guard duties, was announced.⁵⁰

The Home Guard, therefore, was to go from strength to strength. Lieutenant General C. J. E. Auchinleck, G.O. C.-in-C. Southern Command, believed that, "The Home Guard is capable of playing a great part in the defence of the country against attack from the air or from the sea."⁵¹ General Brooke also commented,

"The Germans have developed a strategy of infiltration which results in the battlefield not being confined to the front lines of the opposing forces. To meet this strategy and its accompanying tactics, there must be a widely dispersed force to take the shock of the enemy's primary attacks. Consequently, the most modern defensive strategy involves just such a force as the Home Guard and its function is just as important to the organisation of the defence of a country as the functions of any of the other forces of the regular army."

The Prime Minister also believed fully in the value of the Home Guard. "The Home Guard is as much a part of the Army as is the Grenadier Guards," was his comment, and in a speech in the House of Commons on 5th November 1940 he stated,

50. House of Commons speeches by Sir Edward Grigg, 6 and 19 November 1940; and Longmate, Norman: op. cit., pp. 46 and 57-58.

51. Parkinson, Roger: The Auk: Auchinleck: Victor at Alamein, p. 167, Granada, London, 1977.

"A country where every street and every village bristles with loyal, resolute armed men is a country against which the kind of tactics which destroyed Dutch resistance would prove wholly ineffective. A country so defended would not be liable to be overthrown by such tactics." 52.

The Home Guard were to be seen in every parish in Britain and were a very visible sign of Britain's determination to resist. Using the Home Guard as a cover, however, was a far smaller and far more secret organisation comprising many separate elements. These were the 'stay-behind parties' or 'Auxiliary Units', established by Colonel Gubbins in the dark days of June 1940 following the evacuation from Dunkirk. Organised nominally into three battalions covering Scotland, Northern and Southern England, and wearing Home Guard uniform to disguise their activities (though never formally enrolled in the Home Guard and therefore unprotected by the Geneva Convention), they comprised poachers, gamekeepers, fishing and shooting ghillies, stalkers, farmers and farm labourers, tin and coal miners, ex-Boy Scouts, hikers, mountaineers, market gardeners, fishermen, and even parsons, physicians, local council officials, blacksmiths, hoteliers or publicans. They ranged in age from their early 'teens to their 70's. Common to all, however, was their local knowledge, their ability to blend where necessary into the countryside around them and their ability to keep a secret, live rough and go on fighting until they had won or were killed. Like the officers hand-picked to train them, they had to be men with initiative who liked working independently. Selected individually and carefully vetted before being thoroughly trained, the men of each Auxiliary Unit patrol of perhaps 13 men built their own well-camouflaged underground hideout and stocked it well with arms, ammunition and explosives, often of the very latest type, and food. The Auxiliary Units were given top priority in the issue of such items as Thompson sub-machine guns newly arrived from America, snipers' rifles with telescopic sights and silencers, the newly developed 'plastic' explosive, 'time pencil' delayed action-firing switches, sticky bombs and Fairbairn Commando daggers.

The Auxiliary Units were to function as Britain's very own Resistance network and by the time of the 'Cromwell' crisis of September they were already well established in the areas inland from Britain's coasts up to a distance of 30 miles inland, especially in the South East and East Anglia, but also in the South West, South Wales and along the Lincolnshire, North-East and Scottish coastlines. If the Germans invaded any part of Britain,

52. CAB 106/1189: Home Guard: Summary Report prepared for US War Dept. by J. K. Howard and H. Wendell Endicott, pp. 6 and 10, June 1941.

all Auxiliary Unit members in the area were to disappear immediately from their homes and move into their hideouts. They would then wait quietly below ground until the Germans had occupied their area or simply by-passed it, before coming out to attack. After each attack, the Resistance would quietly disappear again. At no time during the enemy occupation would they ever have returned to their homes or have tried to communicate with their families. Their task would be to cause as much disruption in the enemy rear areas as was possible by attacking houses used as German headquarters or communication centres, fuel and ammunition dumps, supply dumps, bridges, roads, railways or airfields captured and used by the Germans, and a host of other targets, thus forcing the enemy to divert valuable troops to guard them in numbers far greater than the 5,000 or so volunteers who were eventually to make up the Auxiliary Units. By the end of 1940, some 300 hideouts were already in use and the number was to rise to over 1,000 hideouts later in the War.

How long each Auxiliary Unit patrol would actually have lasted in practice is a moot point. Many would undoubtedly have been eliminated by the Germans after only one attack, or within a few days or weeks at the most. They would lack communication and co-ordination between cells and the civilian population was bound to suffer ruthless German reprisals. Their loosely-knit command structure and the emphasis on each cell remaining as independent as possible of any other cell, however, would also have been the greatest strength of the British Resistance, and they would almost certainly have sparked off other unofficial Resistance activity in the enemy-occupied areas and even organised such activity. In David Lampe's words, "The less each individual patrol knew of the activities of its neighbours, the better. As long as a single patrol functioned, the last ditch would not have been crossed." While Peter Fleming, who himself set up the Kentish and Sussex Auxiliary Units in General Thorne's XII Corps area, later wrote of the Auxiliary Units:

".... within a bridgehead under heavy counter-attack, its diversionary activities would have had a value wholly disproportionate to the number of guerrillas involved. It is difficult to find fault with Churchill's estimate of Auxiliary Units as 'a useful addition to the regular forces'." 53.

More unorthodox still were some of the activities of the Petroleum Warfare Department. Set up in June under Geoffrey Lloyd, Secretary of State for

53. Lampe, David: The Last Ditch: The Secrets of the Nationwide British Resistance Organisation and the Nazi Plans for the Occupation of Britain 1940-1944, pp. 66-73, Cassell, London, 1968; and Fleming, Peter: Invasion 1940, pp. 267-273, Rupert Hart Davis, London, 1957.

Petroleum, acting in collaboration with Lord Hankey, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and drawing on the resources of the petroleum industry, the Department aimed to use surplus oil stocks that would otherwise have been destroyed to deny their use by the invader, as positive weapons of war. The desperate shortage of conventional anti-tank weapons following Dunkirk, combined with the general sense of urgency had created a climate very favourable to such new suggestions and, commencing in July, a great number of experiments, some successful and others unspectacular (or even highly spectacular) failures, were carried out to this end. The development of a simple catapult capable of throwing petrol grenades, certain types of flame protectors, 'fire ships', 'fire cars' and fire-sprays by means of underground pipes both designed to deny to the enemy the use of airfields, were quickly abandoned, but experiments with mobile units, petrol sprays from road blocks or buildings, various types of flame-thrower, buried 'petrol mines', fire screens offshore or on beaches by means of concealed pipes, petrol bombs, and with petrol guns or mortars were continued into the autumn and even into 1941, although most were finally found to be impracticable. Attempts to 'set the sea on fire', however, did provide impressive propaganda, if little else. The most successful and practical weapons, nevertheless, were the various means to flood a road quickly with petrol from concealed pipes on the approach of enemy vehicles, these 'static flame traps' then being ignited by 'Molotovs', 'fougasses' or later on by automatic electrical ignition or remote control; and 'flame fougasses', groups of 40 gallon drums of oil buried in roadside banks, in concrete or in mounds of earth and sandbags, the burning mixture being propelled with considerable force by charges of powder and ammonal across or down a road at points where enemy vehicles might be expected to slow down. The last two devices had most potential where roads ran through defiles and where sites could not easily be by-passed by vehicles, such as in the North and South Downs areas of Kent and Sussex. By the end of July, thirty 'static flame traps' had been supplied to 1st London Division in East Kent, rising to some 200 sets issued to Eastern, Southern and Scottish Commands by the end of 1940, while some 4,000 'flame fougasses' or 'barrel flame traps' reached Commands by the winter, mostly for operation by the Home Guard. By the end of 1940, some 400 'Home Guard flame throwers' were also to be issued. 54.

54. CAB 63/170-173: The Hankey Papers: Flame Warfare: Petrol and Oil Devices, July 1940 - Feb. 1941; CAB 82/5 DCOS(40)91, 99 & 101, Memoranda on Use of Burning Oil for Defensive and Offensive Purposes, 29 June and 8 August 1940; CAB 79/13 COS(40)261st:2, 12 August 1940; and Collier, Basil: op. cit., pp. 133-134.

Even more unorthodox methods of repelling invasion were, hardly surprisingly, never adopted at all, despite their undoubted ingenuity. A memoranda dated 2nd September 1940 from Admiral-of-the-Fleet Sir Roger Keyes, Director of Combined Operations, was passed to General Brooke. It read as follows:

"It has been suggested to me that loud speakers might be installed in large numbers along the English coast at points favourable for an invading force; these loud speakers being equipped with gramophone records carrying a record in German telling the German landing craft to return to their bases as the invasion is off. The basis of the idea is the German characteristic of inherent obedience to orders; and it is suggested that even if the plan is not - as it will not be - completely successful, it should cause a great deal of confusion and may well upset the smooth working of their plans. The contents of the gramophone records should, of course, be guarded with special secrecy." 55.

General Brooke's comments on this interesting idea, unfortunately, remain unrecorded!

* * *

General Brooke's main hope of repelling the expected invasion continued to lie in the mobile reserves of the Regular Army. On 9th August he had even been relieved of operational responsibility for the Orkneys and Shetlands at his own request, so as to be able to concentrate his attentions more on the defence of mainland Britain. Despite various meetings and discussions on such matters as the Home Guard, reinforcements to the Middle East, details of Bomber Command co-operation in the event of an invasion and of the training of the divisions at home between 10th and 17th August, and a tour, partly by air in his slow, unescorted Flamingo, of the coastal defences of Lincolnshire, Yorkshire and Tyneside on 15th and 16th August, General Brooke now began to implement significant changes in the dispositions of his reserve formations.

The main G.H.Q. Reserves of VII and IV Corps had hitherto been held, in accordance with the plan of General Ironside, in the rear of the main G.H.Q. Stop Line, where, far inland from the East Anglian, South East and South coasts, it was originally planned that the main battle for the defence of London and the industrial Midlands would be fought. This desperate plan, conceived in June and early July when only sandbags and concrete were in

55. DEFE 2/807: Memoranda from 'R.K.', Director of Combined Operations, to C.-in-C., Home Forces, 2 September 1940.

plentiful supply, was by now long outmoded, yet still these reserve Corps, now boasting greatly increased numbers of tanks, artillery and other weapons and equipment and thoroughly organised for rapid counter-attack, were situated almost entirely in precisely the same locations as in the middle of July when General Ironside was still in command of Home Forces. Already General Brooke had ordered that work on the main G.H.Q. Line and the smaller 'stop lines' between this and the coast should henceforth be limited only to the creation of 'nodal points', designed for all-round defence to protect key points such as road junctions and centres of communication, and that these should be manned by the Home Guard and by Regular troops only in the event of their becoming the actual front line, their garrisons in the meantime being withdrawn to strengthen the local mobile reserves.⁵⁶

There now existed in mid August, therefore, something of a void, especially in East Anglia and to some extent in Kent, whereby the thin screen of troops manning the beach and coastal defences could rely only on quick reinforcement from the regular troops in local mobile reserve, placed a short distance inland, the G.H.Q. Reserves having to move great distances before being able to be in a position to intervene effectively in the battle. This was a situation which would give the enemy, in the event of a major seaborne invasion, in all likelihood a crushingly decisive advantage in the first day or two of military operations. It would enable the Germans to overwhelm the beach defences, beat off local counter-attacks and establish themselves firmly ashore with their anti-tank guns backed by infantry, tanks and artillery, ready to repel the attacks of the British G.H.Q. Reserves, when the latter, inevitably delayed by German air attack and perhaps also by German airborne troops, eventually arrived at the battlefield. The changes that General Brooke was to introduce were greatly to improve this unsatisfactory situation, yet one cannot but bear in mind a note by Captain Liddell Hart, written even after the Brooke plan had been fully implemented:

"In view of the muddles, delays and confusion that I saw in big anti-invasion exercises, even in the early months of 1941, I think it likely that they might have broken down altogether if the invasion had come as early as 1940, and the Germans might have advanced a lot further without being checked. In one of these big exercises early in 1941, in Southern Command, the 'invaders' had to be kept marking time on the beaches for 48 hours because the leading counter-attack division did not even arrive on the scene until the second day, and did not manage to mount even a small counter-attack, with a few battalions and a few batteries, until late on the second

56. WO 166: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, Eastern Command, 10 August 1940; and Southern Command, 9 and 15 August 1940; and Collier, Basil: op.cit. p. 144.

day, while the first co-ordinated attack of the leading counter-attack division did not take place until far into the third day. The 'invaders' could have pushed many miles inland by that time if they had been allowed to do so and have thrown the whole of our counter-attack into paralysed confusion." 57.

The essence of the Brooke plan was to close the whole defence layout up nearer the coast. The decisive battle, General Brooke now intended, was to take place as far forward as possible, either in the immediate vicinity of the coast or, at the worst, a short distance inland. Near the coast the local mobile reserves, strengthened by the withdrawal of Regular troops from the beaches, were to be placed within closer striking distance of the probable landing areas. More important, however, was the repositioning of part of the G.H.Q. Reserves especially within IV Corps. Here the 2nd Armoured Division, hitherto situated in the Northamptonshire area, so as to cover both the Lincolnshire and East Anglian areas, was brought forward on 16th/17th August into East Anglia itself, being newly positioned in the area Newmarket - Saffron Walden - Royston - Cambridge. This was a very sensible move. The 2nd Armoured Division, consisting of 1st and 22nd Armoured Brigades and 2nd Support Group, was now well placed to counter-attack any enemy landing which might occur between the Thames estuary and The Wash. It would still have some distance to travel to reach the coast, but almost half the distance it would previously have had to move, while the open country of mid-Anglia provided an excellent training ground in the meantime. The Lincolnshire coast was far less vulnerable and, in any case, ably guarded by the experienced 1st (Regular) Division under Lieutenant General the Hon. H. R. L. G. Alexander's I Corps in Northern Command. Other moves were also soon to take place, but with one exception not until early September. (See Maps 9 and 10.)

On 21st August, General Brooke visited the headquarters of IV Corps, which was itself being brought forward from Gullsborough House near Northampton to Latimer House, Chesham in Buckinghamshire, while an advanced headquarters was being established at Newells House, Barkway, near Royston in Hertfordshire. After discussing the employment of IV Corps with Lieutenant General F. P. Nosworthy, he was taken to see an exercise by its constituent parts: 2nd Armoured Division under its newly appointed commander, Major General 'Rollie' Charrington (who had recently replaced Major General J. C. Tilly), 43rd (Wessex) Division under Major General R. V. Pollock and 31st Infantry Brigade Group under Brigadier H. Latham. The day apparently went well, but General Brooke was not yet happy with the dispositions of IV Corps.

57. Liddell Hart Papers: 1/292/1776, Some Notes and Queries on 'Hitler Invades' by C. S. Forester, p. 58, 1959.

In the meantime, General Brooke had authorised one other move of some significance on 16th August, that of 15 Brigade of the 5th (Regular) Division from near Perth northward to Huntly in Aberdeenshire, where it came under the temporary command of Major General Alan Cunningham's 51st (Highland) Division which had itself been rebuilt to incorporate the former second-line Territorial 9th (Highland) Division earlier in the month. This move to reinforce the still reorganising 51st (Highland) Division was also made in response to the despatch of reinforcements by Scottish Command to the garrison of the Orkney and Shetland Islands, following the alarm on the night of 13th/14th August when it had been reported that "German embarkation along the whole of the Norwegian coast had started". The report, if true, was most likely merely a German exercise in progress, yet it did have the effect of slightly shifting the point of balance of Scottish Command's forces away from the South and of further stretching its already meagre resources. Such, indeed, was General Brooke's concern for the safety of Northern Scotland that he spent the whole of 27th and 28th August inspecting beach and aerodrome defences there at a time when it was becoming clearer that the main battle might be fought much further south.

The formations in reserve, however, remained General Brooke's greatest concern, his attention now turning to some of the formations still in the process of equipping or re-equipping. On 24th August he visited Salisbury Plain to inspect 21st Army Tank Brigade at West Lavington, which now had some 46 Matilda II Infantry Tanks and 33 of the new Infantry Tank Mark III Valentine tanks, with more being added almost daily (see Appendix 11), but which was still only just over half its intended establishment of 150 Infantry Tanks; and 2nd Armoured Brigade at Warminster, together with several infantry battalions. The 2nd Armoured Brigade, temporarily detached from its parent 1st Armoured Division for re-equipment following its losses in France, he found to be in a sorry state, with training progressing well, but with still only a miscellaneous collection of largely obsolete tanks instead of its proper establishment of Cruiser tanks, because priority in their issue was at present with 2nd Armoured Division. On 30th August he paid a visit to South Wales to see a signal exercise by 2nd London Division and then on 31st August, General Brooke, in his own words,

"Proceeded to Aldershot to inspect the New Zealand Division, and was very much impressed with the units I saw. They will be a great loss to Home Forces when they go [the Division was earmarked as an early reinforcement to the Middle East] and a great gain to the Middle East."

Finally, as the German barges collected in the Channel ports, he visited Major General J. A. H. Gammell's 3rd (Regular) Division in Southern Command in the Somerset area on 4th September, following this with a tour of London's defences on the 5th and a visit to 1st Armoured Division in Surrey on 6th September. ⁵⁸.

General Brooke had constantly to make minor but significant adjustments to his forces at this time as new points of vulnerability were revealed, as the moves within Scottish Command had already illustrated. His visits on 4th and 5th September, indeed, were not without good reason. At the beginning of September the 1st and 2nd Royal Marine Brigades at Plymouth departed for operations overseas. This immediately weakened General Brooke's forces in the South West. On 2nd September, therefore, at a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff, he,

".... outlined the arrangements he had made to replace the Marine Brigades in South West England. In effect these arrangements shifted the centre of gravity of his forces towards the South and South West." ⁵⁹.

General Brooke's answer had been to authorise the movement of 9 Brigade of 3rd (Regular) Division from Tetbury in Gloucestershire, to Tiverton in Devon, as well as its 8 Brigade from near Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, to Blagdon in Somerset; the Division's 7 Guards Brigade remained at Bruton, Somerset, and its divisional headquarters at Lackham House near Chippenham, Wiltshire. The 3rd (Regular) Division was also placed under the command of Lieutenant General H. E. Franklyn's VIII Corps. (See Map 10.) It was a sound move, since the vastly overstretched 48th (South Midland) Division in South Devon could not hope to do more than delay an enemy incursion unless supported and the very well trained and equipped 3rd (Regular) Division, until recently commanded by the then Major General B. L. Montgomery, was one of the finest and best prepared formations in the country. Fully mobile and organised for rapid movement, this Division was ideal for its intended role of counter-attacking any enemy forces not dealt with either by 48th (South Midland) Division and 70 Independent Brigade in Devon under VIII Corps, or by 50th (Northumbrian) Division under V Corps in Dorset. The 3rd (Regular) Division, therefore, was a boon to the defence of the South West, which in the last

58. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 10 August - 15 September 1940; and WO 166/1: op. cit., 13-17 August 1940.

59. CAB 79/6 COS(40)290th:1, 2 September 1940.

resort, under the now outdated Ironside Plan, would have otherwise had to give up Cornwall and much of Devon and Somerset and conduct its main defensive battle from so-called Taunton 'stop-line'.

The westward movement of 3rd (Regular) Division, however, had the effect of removing, except for the incomplete armoured forces on Salisbury Plain, the formerly strong reserve available to Southern Command. A dangerous weakness now existed along the South Coast, at least for a few days. (See Map 10.)

The commander of V Corps, whose 50th (Northumbrian) Division and 4th (Regular) Division guarded this long stretch of coastline from the Devon to the Sussex borders, including the Isle of Wight and the important Portsmouth - Southampton area, however, was a rising star, none other than the dynamic and outspoken Lieutenant General B. L. Montgomery, who has his own tale to tell of his influence on the plan already being implemented by General Brooke:

"In July 1940 I was promoted to command the V Corps and from that time begins my real influence on the training of the Army then in England. By this I mean that the V Corps gave a lead in these matters which had repercussions far beyond the corps area of Hampshire and Dorset....

I found myself in disagreement with the general approach to the problem of the defence of Britain and refused to apply it in my corps area, and later in the South-Eastern Army. The accepted doctrine was that every inch of the coastline must be defended strongly, the defence being based on concrete pill-boxes and entrenchments on a linear basis all along the coastline.

There was no depth in the defensive layout or few troops available for counter-attack. Inland, 'stoplines' were being dug all over England; when I asked what troops were available to man the stoplines, I could get no clear answer. There were no troops.

My approach was different. I pulled the troops back from the beaches and held them ready in compact bodies in rear, poised for counter-attack and for offensive action against the invaders. After a sea crossing, troops would not feel too well and would be suffering from reaction; that is the time to attack and throw the invader back into the sea.

On the beaches themselves all I would allow was a screen of lightly equipped troops, with good communications and sufficient firepower to upset any landing and cause it to pause.

My whole soul revolted against allowing troops to get into trenches and become 'Magenot-minded'; any offensive action would then be out of the question, and once the linear defensive system was pierced it would all disintegrate. My idea of the defence was that it must be like a spider's web; wherever the Germans went they must encounter fresh troops who would first subject them to heavy fire and would then attack them.

I rebelled against the 'scorched earth' policy which had advocates in Whitehall; their reasoning was that as the Germans advanced inland towards London, so we would burn and destroy the countryside as we retreated. I said

we would not retreat, nor would the Germans advance inland. Thus confidence in our ability to defeat the Germans was built up, at any rate in the area under my command." 60.

This, in fact, together with the hard and thorough training of the troops at all levels, the ruthless weeding out of the more elderly and incompetent officers and the instillation of a sense of urgency, offensive eagerness and optimism in the Home Forces (though without Montgomery's particular emphasis on fitness) was precisely General Brooke's approach as well. A plan relying on mobile offensive action to be successful, however, had to have the means to achieve that mobility and despite great improvements in the equipment situation since June, this was still lacking. The War Cabinet, discussing the question of priority production especially of aircraft on 6th September, referred also to the large demands for the production of vehicles for the Army and heard the Secretary of State for War report:

".... that only five divisions had their first line transport complete. The Army realised that they would have to do with make-shift vehicles for the second-line transport, but if make-shift vehicles were used for the first-line transport, the divisions so equipped could not operate across country." 61.

There were certain areas of vital importance where the idea of 'stop-lines' could not even now be totally abandoned. Chief among these were the approaches to London and in the defences of the capital. Whether the Germans landed in East Anglia or the South East, London was bound to be their main objective ultimately. The Prime Minister was as well aware as General Brooke of the enormous importance of holding the capital. In a minute to the Chiefs of Staff on the use of heavy artillery batteries to deny the enemy the use of ports and landing beaches and to support counter-attacks, on 30th August, he wrote,

"I should like also to be informed of the real lines of defence drawn up between Dover and London, and Harwich and London. Now that the coast is finished, there is no reason why we should not develop these lines (which should in no way distract us from the principle of vehement counter-attack)." 62.

60. Montgomery, Field Marshal The Viscount of Alamein: Memoirs, pp. 70 and 74-75, Collins, London, 1958.

61. CAB 65/9 WM(40)244th:6, 6 September 1940.

62. CAB 80/17 COS(40)685: German Coast Batteries: Letter from the Prime Minister to the COS, 30 August 1940.

General Brooke also felt that the defences of London against enemy ground attack were still not adequate and an inspection of the innermost ring of defences a few days later seemed to confirm his view. Later that day, 5th September, having discussed the matter with the G.O.C. London Area, he wrote,

"Spent the day with Bertie Brooke going round London defences.... Defences on north-east, east and south-east satisfactory, but in southern sector still below standard." 63.

The defences of the capital itself were one thing. The restarting of work on the 'stoplines' on the north-east and south-east approaches to London, however, was quite another. General Brooke quite rightly, in view of the lessons of the recent campaign in France, refused to countenance this beyond the fortification of carefully selected 'nodal points', the strongest of which were soon to be designated 'anti-tank islands'. His view was to some extent shared by Sir Auckland Geddes, Regional Commissioner for South East England, the sector guarded by Lieutenant General 'Bulgy' Thorne's XII Corps. As the struggle in the air reached its climax on 15th September, Geddes wrote,

"Clearly, if we cannot hold them in the air, they will invade and our soldiers frighten me. This new armoured warfare seems to have got them guessing. As I see it you can only stop mobile armour with armour, but they seem to think that a steel shield carried on a tracked vehicle is the only armour. I have been trying to push into Bulgy the conception that concrete is also armour and that the dashing movements of relatively small numbers of men in tanks, which have destroyed France, can be prevented if we create static armour at nodal points to limit their movements until troops from the interior (if there are any in the interior) can arrive to push them into the sea. The idea of 'stoplines' seems to me to be futile if I were in command, I should armour the nodal points in our network of roads and hang on in these armoured points to the local end. Special arrangements must be made for the civilians in them, but that I can do.

To armour nodal points seems to me the best thing we can do until mobile armour can be created. Tank forces are silly things to be conquered by. The answer to machines is always the same brains and energy." 64.

Static 'nodal points', though, however well chosen and well fortified, could only hope to delay an enemy armoured thrust. Inevitably they would eventually be either captured with the aid of the Germans' supporting infantry and artillery, however long this might take, or be bypassed. General

63. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 5 September 1940.

64. Liddell Hart Papers: 1/311/11d, Stray Notes on Military Points 1940-1942 by Lord Geddes, 15 September 1940.

Brooke, therefore, continued to concentrate his attention primarily on the "troops from the interior", the counter-attack forces on which the successful defeat of any enemy lodgement ultimately depended. (Although, quite conceivably, an enemy force with its passage inland blocked by static defences might also be forced to surrender if the Royal Navy effectively cut its communications by sea and thus prevented its re-supply.)

Between 6th and 12th September, General Brooke carried out a second series of movements among his reserve formations. Firstly, on 6th September, Major General B. Freyberg's 2nd New Zealand Division of 5th and 7th New Zealand Brigade Groups and a composite unit named 'Millforce' was moved forward to the Maidstone-Ashford area, together with 5 R.T.R. from 1st Armoured Division. The New Zealanders' planned move overseas was postponed in view of the now obvious threat from the German occupied Channel ports and they were instead placed, with 5 R.T.R.'s Cruiser tanks, under command of Thorne's XII Corps. Their task was to counter-attack, using interior lines, any enemy invasion force not contained by Liardet's 1st London Division in the seemingly very vulnerable Dover promontory or Schreiber's 45th (West Country) Division in the area of Romney Marsh. The move was made in direct response to the Chiefs of Staff's concern about the safety of the Dover promontory, as expressed at their meeting only the previous day, and was undoubtedly a wise placement by General Brooke in view of the comparatively long time it would take units of VII Corps to deploy in this area if an emergency arose. Secondly, on the same day, 126 Brigade of 42nd (East Lancashire) Division, now reorganised as a mobile Brigade Group of all arms, was moved from Holme's X in Northern Command to the Oxford area and added to IV Corps to strengthen the G.H.Q. Reserves. From its new central position it could be rushed to reinforce either the forces on the South Coast or in East Anglia, or even be moved to the South East.⁶⁵ (See Map 10.)

It was at this point that a new development arose. "All reports look like invasion getting nearer. Ships collecting, dive-bombers being concentrated, parachutists captured, also four Dutchmen on the coast," wrote General Brooke on 7th September and, after describing in his diary his busy day, he added, "Finally dined with Bertie after sending out order for 'Cromwell' State of Readiness in Eastern and Southern Commands."⁶⁶

65. WO 166/1: op. cit., 6 Sept. 1940.

66. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 7 September 1940.

Home Forces were already at eight hours' notice to move, with the troops in addition 'standing to' at dawn and dusk. That afternoon, even as the German bombers had switched their attentions from the R.A.F.'s air-fields to the capital itself, the Chiefs of Staff had decided to bring Home Forces to their final state of readiness. This involved issuing the code-word, 'Cromwell', signifying "immediate action" as detailed in G.H.Q. Operational Instruction No. 1 issued by the previous C.-in-C., Home Forces, General Ironside, as long ago as 5th June. On its receipt, troops "would take up battle stations, telegraph lines essential for operational purposes will be taken over and all liaison officers will take up their duties".⁶⁷ Unfortunately not only was there no intermediate stage between 'eight hours' notice' and 'immediate action', but it was soon to be discovered that the system had in many cases not been properly explained to the formations and units that had come under the command of Home Forces since the Operational Instruction had been issued.

The signal, 'Cromwell', was sent out from St. Paul's School, Hammer-smith, at seven minutes past eight o'clock that evening of 7th September by Brigadier Swayne, Deputy Chief of Staff at G.H.Q., Home Forces. According to Brigadier Swayne's own recollection, he authorized the despatch of the signal "on his own responsibility before the outcome of the meeting of the Chiefs of Staff was known to him and on the assumption that neither of his superiors was available for consultation".⁶⁸ This claim, however, does seem rather suspect. Certainly his immediate superior, Lieutenant General Paget, had represented the C.-in-C., Home Forces, at the Chiefs of Staff's meeting at 5.30 p.m. and had not yet returned. General Brooke, on the other hand, had attended the Chiefs of Staff's earlier meeting at 12 noon, but had then returned to St. Paul's where he discussed the expansion of the armoured forces during the afternoon. The decision at the Chiefs of Staff's later meeting, that the Commander-in-Chief was to issue the signal for immediate notice, must have been communicated to General Brooke, present at St. Paul's School, well before 8.00 p.m. that evening, giving him ample time to make the final preparations. General Brooke's own diary gives no hint that the signal was issued without his personal authorization, although Brigadier Swayne, most likely acting on General Brooke's specific instructions, probably saw the signal was sent out correctly from G.H.Q.,

67. CAB 79/6 COS(40)300th:1, 7 September 1940; and WO 166/1: op. cit., June 1940: Appendix B: GHQ Operational Instruction No. 1, 5 June 1940.

68. Collier, Basil: op. cit., p. 223.

Home Forces. Rumours that the Government had been thrown into confusion on this Saturday night and had issued 'Cromwell' as a panic measure, and Churchill's own claim that the Chiefs of Staff were unaware "that the decisive codeword 'Cromwell' had been used", ⁶⁹. are equally unfounded in view of the Chiefs of Staff's carefully considered conclusion based on the available evidence for the imminence of invasion, not on the sudden beginning of the 'Blitz' on London, and in view of the next meeting of the War Cabinet not taking place, as was established practice, until the Monday following the weekend, while the various ministers and officials functioned as normal.

Whatever the controversy surrounding its issue, the signal 'Cromwell' was sent out to Southern and Eastern Commands, to the London Area and to the Headquarters of IV Corps, VII Corps and 126 Brigade Group in G.E.Q. Reserve, and was in addition repeated to all other Commands for information only. Furthermore, all leave was stopped for Home Forces personnel, although those already on leave were not yet recalled. Also that evening the Australian Infantry force in Wiltshire, hitherto under War Office control pending their despatch to the Middle East, was placed under the command of Home Forces who were to allocate the force to Southern Command's control the next day. ⁷⁰. The Australians, very eager though only two brigades strong, were to become Southern Command's new mobile reserve, partly filling the gap left by the 3rd (Regular) Division's departure to the West Country a few days before, although even with their addition the long South Coast still remained fairly vulnerable. (See Map 10.)

Receipt of the codeword 'Cromwell' that Saturday night, meanwhile, had caused much excitement and confusion, although in some cases it seems to have taken some four hours to reach troops on the coast. By this late hour, many headquarters were sparsely manned, many senior officers being on weekend leave. The night-duty officers with the field formations were often junior officers with little experience. Such were the changes since 5th June, that few knew what 'Cromwell' really meant. To some it meant nothing at all, while to the majority who received it, it was believed to signify that an invasion was actually in progress. In addition, not all the forces in Western, Northern and Scottish Commands realised that the codeword had had been sent to them for information only and not for action. ⁷¹. The

69. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., p. 276.

70. WO 166/1: op. cit., 7-8 September 1940.

71. Fleming, Peter: op. cit., p. 281.

German bombers, moreover, had returned for a third time that day, at 8.20 p.m., to feed the fires now raging in London, especially in the dockland area. As darkness came, the bombers, now unimpeded by the R.A.F.'s fighters and with British night-fighting techniques and equipment in its infancy, continued their activities until 4.30 a.m. on Sunday, 8th September.

The heavy raids on London only added to the confusion caused by the 'Cromwell' alert. In some areas the Home Guard, though unaware of the content of the message, were quickly aware of the situation and responded with gusto. Church bells were rung by Home Guard commanders on their own initiative to call out their men, thereby giving the impression that enemy parachutists were already descending on the countryside and that German E-boats were approaching the coast under cover of night. These and other rumours, including reports that enemy parachutists had actually landed, all added to the prevailing atmosphere of expectancy. In many places roadblocks were closed, some telephone exchanges were taken over by the military or refused to accept non-official calls, and in Eastern Command several bridges in one sector were demolished by the Royal Engineers, while near Louth in Lincolnshire three Guards officers of 1 Guards Brigade were unfortunately killed by landmines laid in the road along which they were driving. In other areas all remained quiet and the warning was virtually ignored, since the recipients were unaware of its meaning. ⁷².

In an attempt to halt the confusion a second signal left G.H.Q., Home Forces, at 10.45 a.m. on the Sunday, stressing to Western, Northern, Scottish and Aldershot Commands that 'Cromwell' had been for their information only and not for action. This signal was ordered by General Brooke, who had arrived at his office that morning to find ".... further indications of impending invasion. Everything pointed to Kent and East Anglia as the two most threatened points." ⁷³. General Brooke also issued instructions as to the intermediate stages by which the vigilance of Home Forces could be increased without declaring an invasion imminent and, in addition, he made it clear that even on receipt of 'Cromwell' the Home Guard were not to be called out except for special tasks; whilst church bells were only to be rung on the order of a Home Guard who had seen as many as twenty-five parachutists landing. They were not to be rung because other bells had been heard or for any other reason. A previously planned move of the New Zealand Division back to Aldershot was also held in abeyance. ⁷⁴.

72. *ibid.*, pp. 281-282.

73. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 8 September 1940.

74. Churchill, W. S.: *op. cit.*, p. 276; and WO 166/1: *op. cit.*, 8 Sept. 1940.

Rumours that morning, hardly surprisingly, continued to abound. The most widespread of these was that the Germans had launched an attempted invasion the previous night, but that their forces had been cut to pieces in passage by the Royal Navy and the R.A.F., many of their soldiers being drowned or burnt to death in patches of sea covered with flaming oil. During the previous month the corpses of some 36 German soldiers had indeed been washed up at scattered points along the coast between Great Yarmouth and Cornwall, but the most probable explanation of these was that the Germans had been practising embarkations in barges along the French coast and that some of these had been sunk either by British bombing or by bad weather. This incident, nevertheless, combined with the opening of the 'Blackpool Front' on 5th September as the R.A.F.'s bombers began bombing the enemy barge concentrations in the French and Belgian Channel ports by night, an action clearly visible from the Kentish cliffs, and taken together with the excitements of the previous night, all appeared to give substance to the story of a failed enemy invasion attempt. This story was to persist until after the War. No mention of the German corpses or of the 'Cromwell' alert was made in the newspapers or in Parliament at the time despite all the speculation, nor was the belief shared by the British Government, the Chiefs of Staff or the other authorities with access to the air reconnaissance reports, but the story was never officially denied, at least until after the War was over. Churchill later explained that,

"We took no steps to contradict such tales, which spread freely through the occupied countries in a wildly exaggerated form and gave much encouragement to the oppressed populations."

As to the 'Cromwell' incident, he merely added,

"It served as a useful tonic and rehearsal for all concerned." 75.

That evening of 8th September, General Brooke again called in at his headquarters, still believing that invasion was imminent. His apprehensions are recorded in his diary:

".... all reports still point to the probability of an invasion starting between the 8th and 10th of this month.... I wish I had more completely trained formations under my orders. But for the present there is nothing to be done but to trust God and pray for His help and guidance." 76.

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75. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., pp. 275-276.

76. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 8 September 1940.

The 'Cromwell' alert on the night of 7th/8th September 1940 marked the climax of the invasion scare for Britain's Home Forces. 'Cromwell' was to remain in force until 12 noon on 19th September, but from 11.00 p.m. on 8th September the degree of alert was reduced from 'immediate notice' to four hours' notice to move for all formations and units in G.H.Q. Reserve, although the troops of Southern and Eastern Commands and of London Area were to remain at action stations for the whole twelve day period. With the final cancellation of 'Cromwell', mainly because of its unacceptable effects on the Army's training and its unpopular repercussions on the leave roster, a new form of alert was introduced. The four hours' notice instruction for G.H.Q. Reserve was also cancelled on 19th September as the new system came into force.

The details of the new stages of alert for the Army were outlined in a message from G.H.Q., Home Forces, to the headquarters of all Commands and of IV and VII Corps. The instruction, issued on 18th September and intended to come into effect from noon on the 19th, was also repeated for information to the Admiralty, the Air Ministry, the Home Defence Executive and to H.Q. British Troops in Ireland. This time the instruction, signed by Brigadier Swayne on General Brooke's behalf, was given with clarity and was explained in full detail. The unfortunate lessons of the night of 7th/8th September had been fully learned. The controversial codeword 'Cromwell' was cancelled, but it was still considered that "the risk of invasion has not diminished and is not likely to do so for some time to come". The message went on:

"It is therefore necessary to maintain an adequate state of readiness over this period whilst allowing certain facilities for training and avoiding undue stress and consequent staleness the following state of readiness will be maintained by all troops of the Field Army. Beaches will be patrolled during the hours of darkness and troops will stand to at dawn; in foggy weather very active patrolling will be carried out and sentry posts will be increased as necessary. Defences will be manned on scales to be laid down by G.O. C.-in-C.s. Home Guards will NOT be called out except for special purposes.... Seven days leave for five per cent at a time of officers and O.R.s will be reinstituted...."

Finally, the modified form of alert was described:

"For a further state of readiness the term 'CROMWELL' will NOT be used, but the message 'STAND TO' may be sent out, indicating conditions particularly favourable for an invasion. On receipt of this message, troops will come to a complete state of readiness, but the Home Guard will NOT be called out except for special purposes as ordered by G.O. C.-in-C.s.

For a full scale state of readiness including the calling out of the Home Guard, the message 'ACTION STATIONS' will be sent out, indicating the

immediate threat of invasion. On receipt of this message, further leave will not be granted, but personnel on leave will NOT be recalled by Commands. Orders for the return of such personnel from leave will be issued by [G.H.Q.] HOFOR.. Necessary telephone and telegraph lines will be taken up.

After issue of 'ACTION STATIONS' further instructions as to standing down of Home Guard will be issued by HOFOR. as situation develops.

Messages 'STAND TO' or 'ACTION STATIONS' will be addressed only to those who are to take action. To others they will be repeated for information only." 77.

As it happened, only three days later, on 22nd September, conditions were again judged to be favourable for invasion and the first stage of the new alert, 'Stand To', was issued, this time without any of the mishap and confusion that had attended the issue of 'Cromwell'. 'Stand To' was then cancelled on the following day, never to be re-issued, and leave was again reopened. The possibility of a German attack during the autumn, however, perhaps under cover of fog or darkness could even now not be discounted and the cancellation of 'Stand To' on 23rd September was therefore accompanied by a stern warning message from General Brooke:

".... the Commander-in-Chief directs that measures are taken to ensure that guards and sentries are at all times on the alert, that patrolling during the hours of darkness and in fog on the South and East coasts is active and that arrangements exist and are frequently tested to ensure that a state of readiness to meet invasion can rapidly become operative. He hopes that within these limitations, training will be energetically continued." 78.

Tension, in the meantime, had remained high, both in the twelve days following the eventful night of the 7th/8th September and during the following four days until the cancellation of 'Stand To' on the 23rd September and even beyond. The heavy enemy air attacks on London continued both by day and night. On the 9th September there were heavy daylight air attacks on Greater London by over 200 enemy bombers. Lively air combats had occurred over Kent and the south west suburbs of London, resulting in the loss of 28 enemy aircraft to the R.A.F.'s 19 fighters. At the War Cabinet's meeting that day, General Brooke urged that "in view of the advanced state of the enemy's preparations for invasion" and the acute danger from enemy bombing

77. WO 166/1: op. cit., 8 and 19 September 1940; and September 1940 Appendix D: Cancellation of 'CROMWELL': 'STAND TO' and 'ACTION STATIONS' to replace it, 18 September 1940.

78. WO 166/1: op. cit.: Appendix E: 'STAND TO' cancelled and Leave Reopened, 23 September 1940.

if an invasion occurred in the South East, the compulsory evacuation of all but essential civilians from the towns along the coast from Ramsgate to Brighton (both inclusive) and from four inland towns, should be immediately implemented. The Cabinet, however, declared that "the time available did not permit of the adoption of a compulsory evacuation scheme" and refused to apply any scheme of evacuation to Brighton "having regard to the fact that accommodation and transport would not be available for the large numbers of people concerned". It did agree, none the less, to extend the stimulation of voluntary evacuation of the non-essential civilian population of the 19 East Coast towns between Great Yarmouth and Folkestone, put into operation on 3rd July, that had successfully reduced the population of these towns by some 40%, to include the South Coast towns from New Romney to Newhaven and the inland towns of Canterbury and Ashford in Kent, plus Ipswich and Colchester in East Anglia. The War Cabinet also specified that the extension of voluntary evacuation should be merely a temporary measure and, so that the general public would not be alarmed, no mention of it should appear in the national newspapers. 79.

General Brooke had had more success with the Chiefs of Staff that day than with the War Cabinet. At a meeting earlier that morning he had persuaded the Chiefs of Staff to defer until 17th September a decision on the despatch of further reinforcements to the Middle East. These were to consist of the Australian Infantry Force (18,000 men), the 2nd New Zealand Division (22,000 men), two Cruiser tank battalions and various support units, all very crucial forces if Home Forces were expected to repel successfully an invasion. The reinforcements were urgently required in Egypt, where an Italian invasion was now imminent, and were originally due to be withdrawn from Home Forces on the 15th for sailing on the 25th September. The Chiefs of Staff, fortunately, had agreed that "in view of the critical situation that now existed in the United Kingdom, it would be unwise to send troops out of the country" and duly recommended to the Prime Minister that the departure of the Middle East convoy should be delayed one week and instead sail on 3rd October.

The troops earmarked as reinforcements to the Middle East, however, would still have to be withdrawn from their immediate operational role with Home Forces about ten days before their convoy sailed. This would now be around 23rd September, still far too soon for General Brooke who remained

"strongly opposed" to these troops, "particularly the Cruiser tank battalions", leaving the country at this critical time. The Chiefs of Staff, on the other hand, had to take a much wider strategic view of the whole war situation and rated the security of the Middle East as being second only to that of the United Kingdom. "The problem is one of balancing risks," they realised. They also believed that the days up to the 13th September would be the most dangerous period for invasion. "After the 13th September," the Chiefs of Staff declared, "the conditions for invasion will be less favourable." 80.

The 10th September saw only minor German bombing raids by daylight, but Greater London was to continue to suffer raids by an average of 160 enemy bombers per night for almost 68 consecutive nights from 7th September until 13th November. Opposed at night only by relatively ineffective night fighters and A.A. batteries, these raids, combined with the more intermittent and far more costly daylight raids on London during September, were to result in many civilian casualties and cause wide areas of devastation in many parts of the capital. The bombing of London, however, did not have any serious effect on Britain's war effort. It removed the threat to the R.A.F.'s vital sector stations and the consequent strain on Fighter Command, while the stress upon the Luftwaffe pilots was only increased as continuous operations and mounting losses began to take their toll.

Across the Channel, reports from British air reconnaissance still showed many small enemy vessels to be moving in a southwesterly direction, especially by night, and entering the ports of Ostend, Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne. Many more barges were visible at Flushing, Antwerp, in the Dutch estuaries and the Belgian canals, although the numbers in these had declined in favour of the Channel ports. Yet more small craft could be seen in the smaller Channel ports such as Zeebrugge, Gravelines, Itaples and Dieppe, while larger merchantmen were visible at Le Havre and in the Dutch ports and estuaries. On 11th September, 5 German destroyers, 9 torpedo boats and 8 minesweepers were seen to have arrived at Cherbourg, while other light naval units were seen in the other French, Belgian and Dutch ports or escorting convoys of barges or small merchant vessels at sea. A close eye, too, was still being kept on the North German ports, where a continuing decrease of shipping was evident, and on the ports of Western France and of Southern Norway, where little enemy shipping activity could be discerned.

80. CAB 79/6 COS(40)302nd:1, and Annex I, 9 September 1940.

By 17th September there were no less than 625 barges and about 30 merchant vessels at Antwerp, plus 25 more barges at Terneuzen, and 145 barges and 18 merchant vessels or coasters at Flushing. In the Channel ports there were 250 barges at Ostend; 140 at Dunkirk, with 80 more barges in the adjoining canals; 266 barges at Calais; 150 barges, 20 merchant vessels and 60 small craft (rising to 230 barges, 29 merchant vessels and over 250 small craft on 18th September) at Boulogne; 7 merchant vessels and 44 small craft at Dieppe; while 205 barges, 52 merchant vessels and 130 small craft were counted at the larger port of Le Havre. By 17th September, more German light naval units were visible, especially at Le Havre where 15 torpedo boats, 17 patrol craft and 14 minesweepers were seen, and at Cherbourg there were now 4 destroyers and 15 torpedo boats, plus another 20 merchant vessels. British aerial reconnaissance over western French ports, on the other hand, continued to yield little of note, except at Brest where some 30 merchant vessels and 50 small craft were visible on 18th September, together with 65 mysterious "small rafts of unusual shape" moored offshore nearby. 81.

The continuing build-up of enemy invasion shipping up to 18th September, combined with the heavy German air attacks on London both by day and at night, convinced General Brooke that an invasion would very soon materialise. The frequent entries in his diary during this tense period give ample evidence of his worries. "Still no invasion today," he wrote on 10th September, "I wonder whether he will do anything during the next few days?"; and on the following day,

"Evidence of impending invasion has been accumulating all day, more ships moving west down the Channel, intercepted cypher messages, etc.. It is still possible that it may be a bluff to hide some other stroke. The next day or two are bound to be very critical." 82.

The Prime Minister also felt that the point of crisis in the invasion build-up was fast approaching. At the War Cabinet meeting at 12.30 p.m. on 11th September, Churchill drew the attention of his ministers to the continuing westward movement of the enemy convoys down the French coast, "A powerful armada was thus being deployed along the coasts of France opposite this country." By now, British bombers were attacking the barge concentrations by night, while the Royal Navy were mounting spoiling operations with

81. COS 106/1198: Air Reconnaissance Reports on Barge Concentrations in the Channel Ports, 8-18 September 1940.

82. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 10-11 September 1940.

cruisers and destroyers also at night. On the previous night two British destroyers and an escort vessel had successfully fired on enemy trawlers and barges off Ostend, although proposed bombardments of Calais and Boulogne on the nights of 8th and 9th September had been abortive. Frequent sweeping operations off the French coast by destroyers and torpedo boats were, in fact, to prove more successful during September than naval bombardments of the Channel ports, which necessitated risking valuable warships close in-shore. "The argument of the naval authorities," Churchill declared, "was that if we were to send our ships to attack these concentrations of barges and merchant vessels along the French coast, we might well throw away forces which would be invaluable to us if these barges and merchant ships attempted to cross the Channel." The previous night Churchill had had a conference with the First Lord, the Secretary of State for War and their advisors as to how the Navy could best be used to counter invasion. On 13th September the battleships 'Nelson' and 'Hood' were to be moved from Scapa Flow to join the 'Rodney', which was already at Rosyth. The 'Revenge' had already been ordered to Plymouth, while the system of air reconnaissance patrols by Coastal Command, now involving the equivalent of 19 squadrons, instead of 15 as in early summer, was being further improved so as to increase the chances of detecting enemy forces in the Channel. Mining operations outside the French ports had also been undertaken. ^{83.}

The Prime Minister's chief concern, however, remained the defence of the Kent promontory, "... the vital stretch of coastline was from the North Foreland to Dungeness," he declared,

"If the enemy should succeed in getting lodgements of troops ashore on this coast, and could capture the guns deployed there, they would have not only a bridgehead, but a sheltered passageway commanded by the coast defence guns from both sides of the Channel."

Churchill proposed various steps for strengthening this essential strip of coastline, including the intensive fortification of gun positions, the making over to the C.-in-C., Home Forces, of the highly trained 'Special Companies' (forerunners of the later 'Commandos'), some of which could be employed in this sector, and the deployment of a regiment of Bofors guns to help protect the troops from attacks by low-flying enemy aircraft. Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for War, added at this point that he had seen

83. CAB 65/9 and 65/15 WM(40)247th:3; and Confidential Annexe, 11 Sept. 1940; and Collier, Basil: op. cit., pp. 224-226.

General Brooke that morning with General Dill. General Brooke, on learning - as he put it - that the Prime Minister "had been somewhat disturbed" by an Admiralty paper concerning the security of the guns mounted in the vicinity of Dover and that he "proposed to visit that sector of the coast tomorrow", had explained to Eden and Dill the problems to be overcome in the defence of the area. The C.-in-C., Home Forces, as Eden now reported to the Prime Minister, had pointed out,

".... that the extension of German shipping down the Channel gave him a longer front to defend. Nevertheless, he agreed with the vital need for protecting the North Foreland-Dungeness sector. He was most grateful that the Special Companies were to be under his command. He would employ some of them in this sector, but he did not propose to move the Companies now at Ryde and Rye.... He preferred to keep the armoured troops and the New Zealand troops in the Maidstone area, as this point was the best for internal communication to either Dover or Dungeness."

Despite his concern over the defence of the Dover promontory, however, Churchill was to conclude the War Cabinet's meeting that day with an optimistic and prophetic remark. Thinking aloud, he considered,

".... it was by no means impossible that the Germans would in the end decide not to launch an attack on this country, because they were unable to obtain the domination over our fighter force." 84.

Later that afternoon the German bombers again returned to bomb London and also Southampton. They were vigorously opposed by the R.A.F.'s fighter squadrons now operating in pairs and acting against a more concentrated target. Of about 250 German aircraft penetrating Kent, only 100 bombers reached London, but 29 R.A.F. fighters were lost compared with only 25 of the raiders, although the operational strength of Fighter Command remained high. The German losses were naturally much exaggerated by the British press at the time and the true figures as given here were not revealed until after the War. Churchill, nevertheless, remained optimistic. "This effort of the Germans to secure daylight mastery of the air over England is of course the crux of the whole War," he declared in a broadcast to the nation that day, 11th September. "So far it has failed conspicuously. It has cost them very dear, and we have felt stronger, and actually are a good deal stronger, than when the hard fighting began in July." Describing the German preparations across the Channel, however, he went on, ".... but no one should blind himself to the fact that a heavy full-scale invasion of this island is being prepared

84. CAB 65/9 and 65/15: op. cit.; and Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 11 September 1940.

with all the usual German thoroughness and method, and that it may be launched now - upon England, upon Scotland, or upon Ireland, or upon all three." The Prime Minister concluded,

"If the invasion is to be tried at all, it does not seem that it can be long delayed. The weather may break at any time.... Therefore we must regard the next week or so as a very important period in our history. It ranks with the days when the Spanish Armada was approaching the Channel, and Drake was finishing his game of bowls; or when Nelson stood between us and Napoleon's Grand Army at Boulogne...." 85.

The Chiefs of Staff, in the meantime, were discussing a report that a German mountain division was located in the Brest area and was believed to be practising cliff climbing:

".... it might be the German intention to attempt to capture a suitable beach by landing parachute troops on the top of neighbouring cliffs and formations of a mountain division at the cliff foot during suitable tide conditions." 86.

Might these specially trained troops be employed in the cliff areas of the Dover promontory, or perhaps on the flanks of an enemy invasion force, or as a diversionary effort, possibly much further westward along the South Coast? Across the Channel, and entirely unknown to the Chiefs of Staff until after the War, the Germans had by now virtually completed their preparations to land in force along a fifty mile front from Hythe in East Kent to Newhaven in East Sussex. 'Sea Lion', although postponed at the Navy's request from the 15th September to 21st September, now required only Hitler's word for operations to commence on the latter date. Since the German Navy, though, needed ten days to complete its hazardous but indispensable mine-sweeping and mine-laying programme, it was essential that Hitler's order or directive either confirming the date of invasion as the 21st, or postponing it, was issued on 11th September. Hitler, however, now began to waver and postponed his final decision until 14th September. Gambling on a British collapse following the intensive bombing of London, he now only awaited news from Goering of German victory in the air.

Only minor German air raids by daylight followed on 12th September, as General Brooke toured forward defensive positions in the Dungeness and Dover areas in company with the Prime Minister, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley

85. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., pp. 290-291.

86. CAB 79/6 COS(40)306th:1, 11 September 1940.

Pound, the Rt. Hon. A. V. Alexander (First Lord of the Admiralty), General Dill and Major General Ismay. "P.M. wanted to watch air-fight, but there was none to see...." wrote General Brooke that night. The poor weather of the 12th continued until late next day, 13th September, and again only minor German air raids were experienced during the daytime, although the nightly bombing of London continued as usual. "Everything looks like an invasion starting tomorrow from the Thames to Plymouth," General Brooke confided to his diary, "I wonder whether we shall be hard at it by this time tomorrow evening?" 87.

On 13th September, Mussolini's much vaunted offensive into Egypt from Libya began. Pressure on Home Forces to send further reinforcements to the hard-pressed and grossly outnumbered British forces in the Middle East would only increase. That night, for the first time, following smaller nightly raids from 5th September and earlier fairly ineffectual attacks on German shipping, airfields and industrial and communications targets in an attempt to delay the enemy build-up in July and August, the whole night's effort of Bomber Command was devoted to the Channel ports and the massed barge and shipping concentrations in them. A total of 91 sorties were flown by Bomber Command that night and some 80 barges were reported to be sunk or damaged at Ostend alone.

Next morning, 14th September, the Chiefs of Staff considered a worrying paper on the possibility that German airborne troops, "lightly equipped with gangster guns and grenades", might be landed by parachute in and around London in an attempt to isolate the capital and paralyse the central machinery of Government by seizing key points in the centre of London, including Whitehall. "Such an attempt might well be attempted by way of surprise even before local air superiority had been obtained," this memorandum, drawn up by the Joint Intelligence Sub Committee, alarmingly stated. The paper did point out, however, that a maximum of 20,000 enemy parachutists would inevitably be expected to suffer heavy casualties in such an operation and could not hope to land simultaneously or effectively to isolate London, nor would they be likely to land in compact bodies within Central London. They could not be supported by glider-borne troops there or in the immediate outskirts because of the presence of the balloon barrage, although gliders could be landed in the open spaces around London,

87. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 12-13 September 1940.

perhaps at dawn. The Chiefs of Staff were worried enough to require the presence of Lieutenant General Paget from G.H.Q., Home Forces, and of Lieutenant General Sir Bertram Sergison-Brooke, G.O.C. London Area, who told them that,

".... in addition to his central reserve of regular battalions he had a number of mobile detachments of approximately 250 men arranged around London. Their primary task was to deal with airborne landings. Of the Home Guard in London approximately 80,000 were available and not required for guarding Vulnerable Points."

He added, however, that, "depending on the time of the day or night at which they were required, it would take from five to twelve hours to call up the Home Guard" and that he had "only twelve guns of working types", although Lieutenant General Paget said that Home Forces would "endeavour to locate more artillery in the London area". At the same meeting, Air Chief Marshal Sir Cyril Newall asked Paget to reassure the C.-in-C., Home Forces, that "the primary task of the bomber force was anti-invasion, but that it was necessary to divert some aircraft for raids on Berlin".⁸⁸

That afternoon the German bombers again attempted to reach Greater London, but were mostly forced to turn back by the R.A.F. fighters, 14 aeroplanes being lost on either side, while Hitler once more postponed his final decision on 'Sea Lion' for another three days at a summit conference in Berlin. This, in effect, pushed^{back} the date for the invasion to commence from 24th September to the 27th, a very late date and just outside the period of 19th to 26th September that the German Naval Staff had deemed suitable from the point of view of tides. Preparations, nevertheless, were to be continued and air attacks on London intensified. "Ominous quiet!" wrote General Brooke on the evening of the 14th, following a visit to 31 Independent Brigade Group in G.H.Q. Reserve during the day, "Have Germans completed their preparations for invasion? Are they giving their air force a last brush and wash up? will he start tomorrow, or is it all a bluff to pin troops down in this country while he prepares to help Italy to invade Egypt....?"⁸⁹ After dark German bombers again hit London, while the British bombers were also active, almost 180 sorties being mounted against the Channel ports.

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88. CAB 79/6 COS(40)309th:1, 14 September 1940; and CAB 80/18 COS(40)740 (JIC); also JIC(40)283: Airborne Attack on London: Memoranda by the JIC, 13 September 1940.

89. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 14 September 1940.

While events in the air and on both sides of the Channel rapidly unfolded and as the invasion crisis came to a head, General Brooke was making full use of the short time available to him to put the final touches to the disposition of the formations and units under his command, that would virtually complete his immediate plans for the defence of the country on land.

Continuing his policy of moving the formations of G.H.Q. Reserve nearer to the most threatened areas of coastline, following the excitement of the night of 7th/8th September, he began next day by moving 130 Infantry Brigade of 43rd (Wessex) Division from Harpenden in Hertfordshire, forward to Great Dunmow in Essex. Now, with two of its three brigades situated in North-West Essex (129 Infantry Brigade was at Newport, Essex) and only its 128 Infantry Brigade and Divisional Headquarters placed further back in North Hertfordshire (near Hitchin and at Watton at Stone, near Hertford, respectively), Major General R. V. Pollok's 43rd (Wessex) Division was more able to intervene quickly to use its mobile infantry in a counter-attacking role in the southern part of East Anglia. Also within IV Corps, on 9th September, General Brooke brought forward 31 Infantry Brigade Group from its central position inland near Oxford, to the position just vacated by 130 Infantry Brigade at Harpenden.⁹⁰ At Harpenden this Brigade Group was now well placed to support 43rd (Wessex) Division in operations in East Anglia. It could move in a counter-attacking role in the event of enemy forces approaching North London or could even be moved southwards into Surrey if VII Corps became committed against a German invasion of the South East. In all, these moves had the effect of further strengthening IV Corps's ability to counter-attack effectively in East Anglia. (See Map 10.)

The bulk of IV Corps was now positioned for counter-attack in East Anglia, while VII Corps was similarly positioned in the South East. Should either of these forces become fully committed in their respective areas, however, with their formations and units becoming tired by action and perhaps mauled by losses, it would then become necessary to bring forward further fresh formations to help from a new reserve. At this stage, General Brooke foresaw that a serious problem might develop. Should the invasion come, say, in the South East, VII Corps was likely to be committed fairly rapidly to oppose it and fresh troops from G.H.Q. Reserve would have to be brought down from East Anglia or even from Northern Command. On the other hand, if the German invasion came in East Anglia, troops from VII Corps might have to move to the north of London. Either way, the troops would

90. WO 166/1: op. cit., 8-9 September 1940; and Appendix A: Location List No. 4, 11 September 1940.

have to move through the vast labyrinth of London or even be transported across the Thames Estuary and either would be a most extraordinarily difficult operation, especially if, as in France, they were under constant air attack, while the rubble strewn streets of the capital were likely to be further blocked with rubble from the continuing enemy bombing. Only the routes to the west of London, where roads and bridges over the Thames were plentiful and there was less air raid damage, offered relatively easy passage to the north-south or south-north movement of reserve formations. Time would be needed, however, to effect such movements and even more time to assemble the troops for the counter-attack when they arrived after a lengthy journey at their destination. Already, General Brooke's predecessor as C.-in-C., Home Forces, had laid down that Lieutenant General Sir Guy Williams's extensive Eastern Command, extending from Sussex to The Wash and effectively split in two by London and the Thames, was to be divided in the event of an invasion between the G.O. C.-in-C., Eastern Command, and Lieutenant General Thorne presently commanding XII Corps in the South East, the two Lieutenant Generals each taking charge of the battle, respectively, in East Anglia and in the South East. "This front," General Brooke agreed, cut in two by the River Thames, "comprised the main danger area from the point of view of invasion, and was much too extensive for one man to control." "I did not like it from the start," he wrote later and he was to divide off the part of it south of the Thames and London Area to create a new South Eastern Command (also including the former Aldershot Command) on 21st February 1941.⁹¹ In the meantime, besides the physical barriers between the two halves of Eastern Command might be added a command problem in the event of invasion that could further hinder the smooth transfer of the G.H.Q. Reserves across the River Thames.

General Brooke's temporary solution to both these problems was to form a new G.E.Q. Reserve which, situated in the South Midlands astride the River Thames and nominally part of IV Corps, could intervene as a central mass of manoeuvre (so lacking in France in May-June 1940) either in support of the G.E.Q. Reserve formations now placed in East Anglia, or in support of those in the South East; or it could intervene, if necessary, in the Hampshire-Dorset sector of Southern Command. A start had already been made on 6th September when 126 Brigade Group of 42nd (East Lancashire) Division was moved from Northern Command to the 'Oxford Area' (actually near Cheltenham in Gloucestershire, at first). Now on 9th September, 125 Brigade Group and

91. Bryant, Arthur: op. cit., p. 198; and WO 166/1: op. cit., 21 February 1941.

Divisional Headquarters were moved to the Newbury-Reading-Kingsclere area, and the next day 127 Brigade Group, also part of 42nd (East Lancashire) Division, was moved to a position just east of Oxford. Finally, on 12th September, 126 Brigade Group was brought forward from Gloucestershire to the Henley-Maidenhead-Pangbourne area. (See Map 10.) Comparatively well equipped, with unusually plentiful transport and its constituent Brigade Groups of all arms well designed for rapid movement, 42nd (East Lancashire) Division was ideally suited to its new role. "A good division which will require a good deal more training," General Brooke wrote after an inspection on 17th September.⁹² His central mass of manoeuvre, however, was still only a single division strong. (See Map 10.)

Apart from the repositioning and strengthening of the G.H.Q. Reserves, General Brooke's other main area of concern during September remained the security of the Dover promontory. "It is that narrow neck of sea that constitutes a danger point now that he [the enemy] has all his shipping assembled on the French coast opposite to it," he wrote on 25th September.⁹³ On 10th September, following General Brooke's successful meeting with the Chiefs of Staff on the previous day, G.H.Q. Home Forces announced that the move of the New Zealand Division back to Aldershot from the Maidstone area "will not take place before 19th September", while the embarkation of the Australian Infantry Force in Wiltshire was similarly postponed. On the same day, Commands were warned "to take precautions against the surprise scaling of cliffs by the Germans"; while the following day, 11th September, saw eight of the newly formed 'Independent Companies' and seven of the new 'Commands' units placed under the operational control of G.H.Q., Home Forces. Of these, 4, 8 and 9 Independent Companies and 5 and 6 Commando were moved to Eastern Command "to be used exclusively to provide additional security for guns in the Dover area". On 12th September, VII Corps was strengthened by the addition of 44 R.T.R. from 21st Army Tank Brigade on Salisbury Plain, its 50 'Matilda' Mk. II Infantry tanks being moved to Redhill, Surrey, to provide a third tank battalion for 1 Army Tank Brigade, which had lost its 7 R.T.R. as a reinforcement to the Middle East during August.⁹⁴ By the 15th September, 1 Army Tank Brigade could boast a total of 153 'Matilda' Infantry tanks, although 27 were still the older machine-gun armed Mk. I variant. (See Appendix 12.)

92. WO 166/1: op. cit., 6-12 September, 1940; and Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 17 September 1940.

93. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 25 September 1940.

94. WO 166/1: op. cit., 10-12 September 1940.

A few days later yet more reinforcements were to be despatched by General Brooke to the Dover area, as on 24th September, 31 Infantry Brigade Group was moved from Hertfordshire to Ham Street, south of Ashford, Kent, and placed under command of 45th (West Country) Division. The following day saw 4 Cheshires, a machine-gun battalion, being moved from Northern Command to Dover to strengthen the local defences, while the New Zealanders' departure from the Maidstone area to Aldershot in preparation for shipment abroad was, in fact, to be further delayed until 3rd November. Finally, on 29th September, orders were issued for the move of 2nd Armoured Brigade, which had hitherto been re-equipping with Cruiser tanks on Salisbury Plain, to near Hindhead in Surrey where it would again come under command of its parent 1st Armoured Division.⁹⁵ By the end of September, 1st Armoured Division was to consist temporarily of 2nd and 3rd Armoured Brigades comprising a total of 125 Cruiser and 23 light tanks, and 20th Armoured Brigade with its 64 'light wheeled' tanks and now 9 Infantry tanks, probably the new Valentines, and 1st Support Group. (See Appendix 13.) General Brooke, however, still felt that the bulk of VII Corps in Surrey, although well placed to be moved if necessary to embark on counter-attacks towards the long Sussex Coast and even as far as to the Vale of Kent, was situated too far to the west to intervene quickly in the Dover promontory and that, despite the most recent reinforcements, this sector remained very vulnerable. "To make the position in the South East of England reasonably secure," he told the Chiefs of Staff on 30th September, "another Corps of two divisions would be needed," while as late as 16th October, following a visit to 1st London Division in the Ramsgate-Deal sector, he wrote,

"The more I look at that salient the more I dislike it. We are definitely too weak there, but I have nothing else to add to that part without depleting other fronts dangerously."⁹⁶

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By the latter part of September, therefore, Home Forces were as ready as they would ever be during 1940 to resist the expected German invasion. Although the general layout of the forces did not appear at a glance to be much different from the dispositions that General Brooke had inherited from General Ironside in July, there had in fact been many changes along the

95. WO 166/1: op. cit., 24-29 September 1940.

96. CAB 79/7 COS(40)329th:1, 30 September 1940; and Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 16 October 1940.

lines of General Brooke's thinking that are not apparent from a simple study of the maps. (See Maps 8-10.) Along the East and South Coasts of England, from Northumberland to Cornwall, were still ranged the same twelve infantry divisions, one motor machine-gun brigade and one independent infantry brigade, as had been there in July, with only the addition of 29 Infantry Brigade Group in West Sussex and the movement of a second Motor Machine-Gun Brigade to the Northumberland coast. The difference now was that, instead of being spread along the coast, the units making up these formations were largely grouped for counter-attack a short way inland, leaving only a thin screen of non-field troops and Home Guard to defend the coastline, though vital ports such as Dover were, of course, more heavily garrisoned. Corps and Command reserves inland from the East and South Coasts had been increased from the three or four infantry divisions available in mid-July to five infantry divisions, an infantry brigade group and two armoured or tank brigades, as a result of General Brooke's policy of moving mobile reserves nearer to the threatened coasts, especially in East Anglia and the South East. Finally, the G.H.Q. Reserves of IV and VII Corps were still situated respectively to the north and south of London, from which positions they could command the shortest routes to the capital. They had been slightly strengthened, and in the case of IV Corps had been brought forward a considerable distance nearer the most vulnerable coasts, and they were by now better practised in their allotted role. To supplement the passing of orders by field telephone and Post Office lines at the disposal of Home Forces, units had been issued with civilian wireless sets, and an Army broadcasting station had been set up to disseminate authentic information and thus counter false reports that might be spread by enemy agents. Artillery and anti-tank guns, moreover, were more effectively deployed; movement-constricting permanent roadblocks had been demolished and, most importantly, the almost purely defensive thinking encouraged by the 'coastal crust' and 'stopline' phase of June and early July had by now been largely abandoned. There had also been a significant movement of formations, especially during September when the German preparations in the Channel ports became clearly visible to British air reconnaissance, to provide better protection to the South and South East Coasts. Churchill, although he somewhat exaggerated the ability of IV Corps to intervene quickly to the south of the River Thames, later wrote,

"Thus in the last half of September we were able to bring into action on the south coast front, including Dover, sixteen divisions of high quality, of which three were armoured divisions or their equivalent in brigades, all of which were additional to the local coastal defence and

could come into action with great speed against any invasion landing. This provided us with a punch or series of punches which General Brooke was well poised to deliver as might be required; and no one more capable." 97.

General Brooke's dispositions of Home Forces to counter invasion appeared to be well thought out and quite satisfactory for the task expected of them, although General Brooke would naturally have preferred to have stronger forces at his disposal. The morale, too, of Home Forces was high and there would have been a grim determination to resist any German incursion. The British Army has traditionally fought well in defence and against an invasion of their own country, Home Forces would undoubtedly have put up the best fight of which it was capable. By September, the Army had almost fully recovered from its defeat in France and Belgium. Its morale had survived that defeat, as had most of its manpower, and since then a thorough reorganization had taken place. A good deal of the equipment lost at Dunkirk or lacking with the formations that did not go to France had been made up with new production or had been brought over from America. The Home Guard, likewise, now largely bore arms of some sort and was already by September proving to be a valuable supplement to Home Forces; while during the last two months the combination of a new and respected commander, of high ability and reputation, and his insistence on rapid counter-attack, had further heightened the morale and offensive spirit of the field army.

Had the Germans launched their carefully prepared invasion of South East England, Operation 'Sea Lion', in September 1940 as planned, could the troops of Home Forces have successfully defended and contained the German forces and then counter-attacked and driven them into the sea? All depended ultimately on the air battle; if the invasion had gone ahead at this time without the Germans achieving the air superiority over South East England needed to contain the activities of the Royal Navy from operating against their sea communications from the flanks, to neutralize the coastal defences by dive-bombing and to support the invading armies, then Home Forces would in all likelihood have succeeded in defeating even quite large pockets of German invaders as, in some disorganization and with their supplies soon cut to a trickle, they attempted to expand their beachheads and advance inland. Had the German Airforce, however, perhaps by continuing its attacks on the R.A.F.'s vital sector stations and on the British radar installations, succeeded in achieving air superiority over South East England, thus severely

97. Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., pp. 262-263.

curtailing the activities of the Royal Navy against their supply lines and allowing a constant flow of supplies and reinforcements to reach the first wave of the invading forces, then could the troops of Home Forces have coped successfully?

A summary of the available evidence suggests that, in the latter case, Home Forces would, even by September, still be very hard put indeed to defend the country successfully. "If the Battle of Britain had been lost the physical occupation of Britain would have presented no serious difficulty," the then Major General Ismay later wrote.⁹⁸ There remained several grave defects in the British Army at home. General Brooke's policy for defence depended upon rapid and audacious counter-attacks on enemy lodgements, but both the means and to a large extent the ability of the troops to achieve this with success were still fundamentally lacking in September 1940.

The means of both effective defence and counter-attack, the equipment situation, had vastly improved since the days following the Dunkirk evacuation, during which Admiral Sir Francis Pridham, President of the Ordnance Board, had been greeted by one of the generals of Home Forces at a staff meeting with the words, "Admiral, if you cannot prevent the Germans from landing on the coasts of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, they would be able to cut through the country and be in Liverpool in forty-eight hours; I have insufficient weapons with which to slow them down, let alone stop them."⁹⁹ Yet much vital equipment was still in short supply by September. Of General Brooke's twenty-seven infantry divisions, only four were fully equipped and less than half had sufficient first-line transport. Most divisions still lacked around 25% of their proper complement of artillery, many of these being ageing pieces, and as much as 75% of their proper complement of anti-tank guns. There were still shortages of Bren light machine-guns, anti-tank rifles, mortars and Bren Carriers, and most especially of light anti-aircraft guns to protect the troops from enemy air attack, plus a lack of wirelesses and all manner of other equipment. The total number of tanks in the hands of the fighting troops on 15th September stood at 748, but of these only the 154 Cruisers and 197 Mk. II and Mk. III Infantry tanks had the 2 pdr. gun and were thus an equal match for the Germans' medium tanks.

98. Ismay, General the Lord: op. cit., p. 182.

99. Pridham Papers, 'My Memoirs', p. 186; and Barclay, G. St. J.: Their Finest Hour, p. 13, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1977.

The remainder, including 306 ill-armoured light tanks and 64 heavy armoured cars, carried only a machine-gun, while the hundreds of open-topped Humberette and Beaverette improvised 'Ironsides' and hastily armoured lorries were clearly no match for virtually any German tank and were vulnerable to even the lightest German anti-tank weapons. Even by the end of September, there were only 179 Cruisers and 238 Mk. II and III Infantry tanks out of a total of 826 tanks with the troops and most armoured formations remained only partially equipped. (See Appendices 12 and 13.) General Brooke's forces, therefore, were still short of the mobility and offensive power that would give them a comfortable prospect of success if the Germans had landed a substantial armoured force. True, the best formations were now poised to intervene quickly in the battle should the Germans land in the South East or even in East Anglia, but it was still necessary to concentrate rapidly in forward areas to throw back any serious challenge, for in a battle on anything like equal terms the enemy were likely to win, while outside the most threatened sectors any German landings would have to be contained by local garrisons, which could expect no immediate help from the general reserve and would depend on the Royal Navy and the R.A.F. to cut off enemy reinforcements and supplies.

Secondly, the ability of the troops of Home Forces to perform effective counter-attacks was still largely lacking by September 1940, again despite recent progress. There was still much training to be done, and indeed much of the coming winter was to be devoted to this end, but inadequate training and experience of modern mobile warfare were for the time being to remain as serious and outstanding weaknesses. Many lessons were not to be learnt until the bitter experiences of the desert fighting of 1941-42 had been fully absorbed, including vital lessons concerning the close co-operation of all arms - armour, infantry, artillery, anti-tank guns and air support.

The direction and co-ordination of larger formations, too, still left much to be desired. If the Germans had landed in September 1940, General Brooke, short on experience but with more than nearly all of the senior commanders at this time, was likely to have handled the battle in England as well as he had his Corps in France, especially since the actual area of operations would have been in a relatively small area. He would also have been ably assisted by two other very good and experienced soldiers, his Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Paget, "able, cheery and never down-hearted", as General Sir Ronald Adam described him, and the popular Guards

officer, Lieutenant-General Thorne, who would have had actual control of the battle in South East England. ¹⁰⁰. Many other senior commanders, however, such as Lieutenant-General Sir Guy Williams commanding Eastern Command, were elderly and had had no experience of modern warfare, while many of the divisional and brigade commanders in Home Forces were also soon to be retired or replaced.

Sir Auckland Geddes, Regional Commissioner for South East England, writing on 25th September 1940, was to point out that, like the problems of equipment, training and command would take some time yet fully to resolve. "The Army worries me most," he confided,

"Its supply position is bad. Its tanks are puerile and all the evils I foresaw in a wrongly timed application of conscription are coming home to roost. You just cannot make an army on a system that takes twenty years to mature in twenty months. The ranks have too many youngsters and as the older classes come in they are the juniors - the same will be true with the officers. I don't see how the Army can get itself right before 1943. If we had had conscription from 1918 to 1939 all would have been well, but as we had not we should have done as in 1914, got a mixed age bag of keen men to start the new units and then have applied conscription - too much planning, too little thinking. These second-line Territorial Divisions are quite pathetic in their incompetence.

Thank God, the R.A.F. has not got direct conscription; they will pull us through until the Army is ready to fight, say 1943. Its a long hard pull, but we shall do it, if our gargantuan bureaucracy can be suffused with the breath of life." ¹⁰¹.

General Brooke's own doubts as to the ability of Home Forces to repel the expected invasion were outlined in his diary, his only outlet for such doubts, on 15th September 1940, the date which, in fact, was to prove the turning point in the invasion crisis and which was later to become known as 'Battle of Britain Day'. "Still no move on the part of the Germans.....," he wrote that evening,

"The suspense of waiting is very trying, especially when one is familiar with the weakness of one's defences. Our coastline is just twice the length of the front that we and the French were holding in France with about eighty divisions and the Maginot Line. Here we have twenty-two divisions [in England] of which only about half can be looked upon as in any way fit for any form of mobile operations. Thank God the spirit is now good and the

100. Interview with General Sir Ronald Forbes Adam, formerly G.O. C.-in-C., Northern Command, 27 February 1980.

101. Liddell Hart Papers: 1/311/11b, Lord Geddes Papers, 25 September 1940.

defeatist opinions expressed after Dunkirk are now no longer prevalent. But I wish I could have six months more to finish equipping and training the forces under my command. A responsibility such as that of the defence of this country under existing conditions is one that weighs on one like a ton of bricks, and it is hard at times to retain the hopeful and confident exterior which is so essential to retain the confidence of those under one and to guard against their having any doubts as regards final success." 102.

General Brooke subsequently noted, however, that,

"It should not be thought that I considered our position a hopeless one. Far from it. We should certainly have had a desperate struggle and the future might well have hung in the balance, but I felt that, given a fair share of the fortunes of war, we should certainly succeed in finally defending these shores."

While Winston Churchill later wrote,

"I have often wondered, however, what would have happened if two hundred thousand German storm troops had actually established themselves ashore. The massacre would have been on both sides grim and great. There would have been neither mercy nor quarter. They would have used Terror, and we were prepared to go to all lengths. I intended to use the slogan, 'You can always take one with you.' But none of these emotions was put to the proof. Far out on the grey waters of the North Sea and the Channel coursed and patrolled the faithful, eager flotillas, peering through the night. High in the air soared the fighter pilots, or waited serene at a moment's notice around their excellent machines. This was a time when it was equally good to live or die." 103.

102. Diaries of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, 15 September 1940.

103. Autobiographical Notes of Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke; and Churchill, W. S.: op. cit., p. 246.

EPILOGUE

The projected German invasion of Britain was never to take place. The plans made by General Brooke and his subordinate commanders, as well as the extensive preparations made by Home Forces, were never, fortunately, to be tested in battle.

Sunday, 15th September, proved to be both the crux of the Battle of Britain and, in effect, the date of demise for Operation 'Sea Lion'. That day Goering's Luftwaffe launched its supreme effort to achieve air superiority over South East England, but to no avail. The 'Big Wing' formations of the R.A.F.'s No. 12 Group, long advocated by its commander, Air Vice-Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory, came to the aid of the hard pressed fighter squadrons of Air Vice-Marshal Keith Park's No. 11 Group to score a notable success against two major German bombing raids on London. No less than 185 German planes were claimed to be shot down in these and two smaller actions that Sunday for the loss of 26 R.A.F. fighters. Even though the German losses were subsequently discovered to be only 60, the appearance of large numbers of British fighters shattered the illusion created by the Germans' own propaganda that they had all but won the air battle and convinced them finally that the air superiority deemed necessary for the launch of Operation 'Sea Lion' could not now be achieved before Hitler took his final decision on whether or not to invade. On the night of 15th September too, the R.A.F.'s Bomber Command attacked in strength enemy shipping in the ports from Boulogne to Antwerp, inflicting particularly heavy losses in the latter. Two nights later 84 barges were claimed to be sunk or damaged at Dunkirk alone. By 19th September the cumulative losses of German barges were believed to total over 200, or more than 10% of the total number of invasion barges available to the Germans, while the disruptive factor to the detailed enemy plans was even greater. The Germans were certain that their preparations were well known to British air reconnaissance and they knew also that the Royal Navy remained intact and increasingly active in the Channel and still had its main units in reserve further afield. In addition, with 'Sea Lion' now planned to commence on 27th September, the Germans were realizing that this date lay perilously close to the beginning of the equinoctial gales predicted for the end of the month and they had calculated that it would take eleven days just to land the whole of the first wave of nine infantry divisions.

Therefore, on 17th September, Hitler, whose thoughts had already turned towards the East, postponed Operation 'Sea Lion', although it was not until 12th October that he gave orders that the invasion should be delayed until the following spring and that the elaborate apparatus of invasion should, in the meantime, be dismantled as unobtrusively as possible. In April 1941, however, came Hitler's invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece, closely followed by the German invasion of Crete in which its elite parachute forces, so important a feature in any future planning to invade the United Kingdom, suffered heavy losses. The late spring of 1941, too, saw the enormous build-up of German and Axis forces for the invasion of the Soviet Union and, from 22nd June that year, Hitler's armies were far too embroiled in the vast, long and very costly Russian campaign to be extricated for any repetition of 'Sea Lion'. In July 1941, in fact, Operation 'Sea Lion' was postponed by Hitler until the spring of 1942, by which time he expected the campaign in Russia to be completed. This proved a vain hope, however, and on 13th February 1942 Admiral Raeder had his final interview with Hitler on 'Sea Lion' and persuaded him to agree to a complete stand-down on the project.

In Britain, in the meantime, Churchill and the Chiefs of Staff had learned through 'Ultra' of Hitler's first long-term postponement of Operation 'Sea Lion' on 17th September 1940, on the very same day as Hitler's decision had been made. The significant clue was the receipt of a signal that morning that Hitler had authorized the dismantling of the equipment specially installed on Belgian and Dutch aerodromes for the loading and quick turn-round of the supply of troop-carrying aircraft that the Germans had intended to use in the invasion. Without this equipment, the British Intelligence staff realized the German invasion could not take place. Next day came further indications that 'Sea Lion' had been cancelled as R.A.F. reconnaissance noted the first small decreases in the numbers of barges in the Channel ports of Flushing, Ostend, Dunkirk and Calais, although the dispersal was at first due more to the necessity of presenting a more difficult target for the British bombers and appearances were, in fact, kept up as far as possible for almost another month. Goering, too, tried to keep up the pressure by mounting intermittent daylight raids on Greater London and Britain's aircraft factories in late September, with further minor raids, mainly by fighter-bombers heavily escorted by fighters, during periods of better weather throughout October, while at night the relentless bombing of London continued until late in the autumn. As for General

Brooke, he kept Home Forces on full alert until 23rd September, with only a short break, and, despite being party to the evidence from 'Ultra', he continued almost daily to expect a German attempt at invasion to take place until mid-October, although he too became increasingly sceptical as the weeks passed. The Chiefs of Staff continued to be cautious and did not lose sight of the possibility of an attempted invasion during the autumn in conditions of fog or weather of low visibility, while the Prime Minister, careful to prevent an over-confident attitude from growing, warned the War Cabinet as late as 15th October that "it would be premature to suppose that the danger of invasion had passed".¹

It was not until the end of October, with weather conditions rapidly worsening, that the immediate danger of invasion was finally believed to have diminished, although worries concerning a possible German seizure of Ireland were to continue. Only then, commencing on 27th October, were a whole series of pre-planned moves put into effect for the troops of Home Forces. The aim was to withdraw the bulk of the field formations for intensive winter training in proper training areas, whilst replacing these with only the minimum number of formations to cover the vulnerable coast-lines of the South East and East Anglia and thus provide security over the winter months. Only then, too, were further strong reinforcements sent to the Middle East, while the Royal Naval destroyers could at last largely be returned to their vital role of protecting Britain's lifeline across the Atlantic.

Space precludes the extension of this study to examine anti-invasion planning and preparations in the spring of 1941 and 1942, and even up to the end of 1944 when the Home Guard were finally stood down, after having helped to provide security in Britain during the build-up to and following the D-Day landings in Normandy, as well as performing a myriad of other useful tasks. Suffice it to say that the formations of Home Forces were comparatively far better organized, trained and equipped to fight a modern war against any invader by the spring of 1941, and even more so by the spring of 1942, than they were during September 1940. The number of tanks available in the hands of the troops, for example, had doubled by May 1941 and tripled by May 1942, while in the air the number of R.A.F. fighters had similarly greatly increased.

1. CMB 65/9 VII(40)271st:2, 15 October 1940.

"Personally, on purely military grounds," Winston Churchill was later to comment darkly,

"I should not have been averse from a German attempt at the invasion of Britain in the spring or summer of 1941. I believed that the enemy would suffer the most terrific defeat and slaughter that any country had ever sustained in a specific military enterprise."

He continued, however,

"But for that very reason I was not so simple as to expect it to happen. In war, what you don't dislike is not usually what the enemy does. Still, in the conduct of a long struggle, when time seemed for a year or two on our side, and mighty allies might be gained, I thanked God that the supreme ordeal was to be spared our people." 2.

2. Churchill, W. S.: Vol. II, Their Finest Hour, p. 510, Cassell, London, 1949.

CONCLUSIONS

British planning and preparations to resist invasion on land during the period September 1939 to September 1940, despite the convenient division in the text between the three successive Commanders-in-Chief, Home Forces, must be viewed as a continuously evolving and developing process. It represented a direct reaction to the threat that was believed by the War Cabinet, the Chiefs of Staff and the military commanders in the field to have existed at the time, even though the actual threat, at least up until the end of August and during September 1940, was in fact fairly minimal. General Kirke's 'Julius Caesar' Plan, conceived in the autumn of 1939, presented sensible contingency planning against a possible threat from the North German ports and by April 1940 from Southern Norway as well, albeit with the most slender of resources at the disposal of Home Forces. Following the rapid and devastating events of May 1940 on the Continent, the same plan was drastically revised. It had incorporated into it the formations of the B.E.F. saved in the 'miracle' of the Dunkirk evacuation, minus most of their equipment, and then it suffered from the results of the abortive scheme to establish a second B.E.F. in Western France as, during June and July, it effectively became the 'Ironside Plan' with the imposition of General Ironside's somewhat over-defensive and outmoded ideas. This period, too, saw a desperate race to secure the protection of the British mainland against what was judged to have become an immediate and dangerous threat. As it transpired, however, the real threat of an invasion by the Germans did not materialize until September 1940, by which time the defence plan had been given a much more offensive nature by General Brooke and Home Forces had become a far better equipped and prepared army, although still possessing many serious deficiencies.

Further, in spite of the enormous British effort as regards anti-invasion planning and preparations on land during the summer and early autumn of 1940, it was not the growth in strength of Home Forces that deterred the Germans from going ahead with their planned invasion in Sept. 1940; they remained supremely confident of victory in any land battle on more-or-less equal terms, even against the most resolute defence. It was instead their failure to secure mastery of the air before the onset of the autumn weather, a failure which also meant that British Naval supremacy in the English Channel could not be seriously challenged. British planning and preparations to resist invasion on land, in all their many aspects,

can in no way, therefore, be said to have been the decisive factor in preventing a German invasion in September 1940.

British planning and preparations for the expected land battle for the possession of the British Isles were, in the event, never put to the acid test by a full-scale German invasion, nor were they even tested on a local level by an enemy raid of any size. Yet the British could never have permitted a complete reliance on air and sea power alone; if these first two lines of defence had failed, there would then only have been the ill-equipped and often partially trained troops of Home Forces between the Germans and complete victory for the Axis powers. Only in the latter situation, would the ability of Home Forces to repel the invader have been of decisive importance. Its vital contribution to the overall mosaic of the defence of the United Kingdom, which took the form of a giant combined operation, should therefore never be underestimated.

APPENDIX 1 (contd.)

- NB: (1) The Prime Minister and Minister of Defence is Chairman of the Defence Committee (Ops.) and the Defence Committee (Supply), and on occasion takes the chair at meetings of the COS.
- (2) Assisted by tactical and artillery reconnaissance aircraft administered by Fighter Command through No. 22 (Army Co-Op.) Group.
- (3) Under War Office, except for Operational Control.

Sources: Butler, J. R. M. (ed.): History of the Second World War: Grand Strategy, Vol. II, Sept. 1939 - June 1941: Appendix VII; and Collier, Basil: History of the Second World War: The Defence of the United Kingdom: Appendix III, H.M.S.O. London, 1957.

APPENDIX 2: FORMATIONS EMPLOYED FOR THE 'JULIUS CAESAR' PLAN, 15 NOVEMBER 1939

Command	Troops Employed	Guns in Artillery Units		2 pdr. A/T Tanks	Remarks
Scottish	9th (Scottish) Div.	8	-	-	Elements of these Divisions are employed. The total number of vehicles required to equip these troops with first line transport = that of one Infantry Division.
	15th (Scottish) Div.	-	8	-	
	52nd (Lowland) Div.	16	24	-	
Northern	1st Cavalry Div.	12	4	-	1st Cav. Div. (6,000) is shortly to be moved to the Middle East.
	42nd (E. Lancs.) Div.	14	19	8	
	49th (W. Riding) Div.	22	24	6	
	1st Light Armd. Brigade	-	-	-	
	1st/7th Royal North. Fus.	-	-	77 Light	
Eastern	18 (E. Anglian) Div.	16	10	4	(a) Includes the Heavy Armd. Brigade (64 light tanks, 25 Cruiser tanks) in G.E.Q. Reserve.
	54 (E. Anglian) Div.	8	10	2	
	12 (Eastern) Div.	-	-	-	
	1st London Div.	12	12	-	
	1st Armoured Div.	-	-	-	
				190 Light 25 Cruiser (a)	(b) Vehicles required to equip the troops in this Command with first line transport = approx. that of the Infantry of three Divs.

(contd. over)

APPENDIX 2 (contd.)

Command	Troops Employed	Guns in Artillery Units 18 pdr. 4.5" How. 25 pdr.		2 pdr. A/T Tanks	Remarks
Aldershot	51st (Highland) Div.	12	24	26)
	60th Army Field Regt.	) 6-8	-	-	) In G.H.Q. Reserve.
	115th Army Field Regt.	)	-	-	) Army Field Regiments
	6th Argyll & Sutherland / Highlanders	-	-	-	) are in process of
	1st/7th Middlesex	-	-	-	) receiving further 18 pdrs.)
Southern	48th (S. Midland)	16	36	8	) In G.H.Q. Reserve. 12th
	12th Army Field Regiment	-	-	-	) Field Regt. (Larkhill)
	4th Cheshire Regiment	-	-	-	) has transport available for one 12 gun Battery.
Western	55th (W. Lancs.)	6	8	-	This Div. will shortly move to the training area at Charnwood Forest (Leics.) where it will be prepared for active operations under G.C.C. Northern Command.

Source: WO 166/1: War of 1939-1945 War Diaries, G.H.Q. Home Forces, Nov. 1939: Appendix 7: The 'Julius Caesar' Plan, 15 Nov. 1939.

APPENDIX 3: FORMATIONS EMPLOYED FOR THE 'JULIUS CAESAR' PLAN, 24 JANUARY 1940

Command	Troops Employed	Guns in Artillery Units 18 pdr. 4.5" How. 25 pdr.	2 pdr. Tanks A/T	Remarks
Scottish	9th (Scottish) Div.	8	-	Elements of these Divisions employed.
	15th (Scottish) Div.	8	-	
	52nd (Lowland) Div.	8	-	
Northern	49th (W. Riding) Div.	24	8	(a) 2nd Armcd. Div. has under command Leic. Yeo., Northumberland Horse, Scottish Horse, 1 Derby Yeo. (holds 12 Armcd. Cars). 22 Hy. Armcd. Bde. have no serviceable tanks, but have been issued with 525 rifles per regt. (b) 55th Div. in H.Q. Reserve.
	2nd Armcd. Div. (a)	-	-	
	55th (W. Lancs.) Div. (b)	6	-	
Eastern	18th (E. Anglian) Div.	14	-	(c) Includes 143 & 144 Army Field Regiments. There are 4 serviceable 13 pdr. with 11 Regt. R.H.A.
	54th (E. Anglian) Div.	8	4	
	12th (Eastern) Div.	12(c)	2	

(contd. over)

APPENDIX 3 (contd.)

Command	Troops Employed	Guns in Artillery Units 18 pdr. 4.5" How. 25 pdr.	2 pdr. A/T	Tanks	Remarks
Southern	42nd (E. Lancs.) Div. 1st Armd. Div. 12th Army Field Regt.	- - -	8 - -	- 190 Light 25 Cruiser -	Increase of 25 pdr. & 2 pdr. A/T expected in near future. In H.Q. Reserve. (d) Includes 4 guns minus dial sights. Further 25 pdrs. are being issued to 12th Army Field Regt. in near future.
Aldershot	115th Army Field Regt. R.A.	23	-	-	In H.Q. Reserve

Source: WO 166/1: op. cit., January 1940: Appendix J: 'Julius Caesar' Plan, Amendment No. 8, 24 Jan. 1940.

APPENDIX 4: FORMATIONS EMPLOYED FOR THE 'JULIUS CAESAR' PLAN, 3 MAY 1940

Command	Troops Employed	Guns in Artillery Units 18 pdr. 4.5" How. 25 pdr.	2 pdr. Tanks A/T	Remarks
Scottish	9th (Scottish) Div.	6	8	(a) Elements of the 15th Div. are employed. In the event of this Div. moving to Southern Command, it will come into H.Q. Reserve from date of completion of move.
	15th (Scottish) Div. (a)	6	4	
Northern	54th (E. Anglian) Div. (a)	6	4	(a) In H.Q. Reserve.
	2nd Armd. Div. (b)	4	2	(b) 2nd Armd. Div. has under Comd. 1 Derby Yeo. who have 12 Armd. Cars. 22 Hvy. Armd. Bde. have no service-able tanks, but have been issued with 525 serviceable rifles. 12th Regt. R.H.A. as 2nd Armd. Div. Artillery.
	66th (Lancs. & Borders) Div. (c)			(c) 7 x 4.5" Hows. borrowed for 23 or 46 Div. R.A.
Eastern	18th (E. Anglian) Div.	4	-	(a) Under op. control 55th Div.
	55th (W. Lancs.) Div.	4	2	(b) This Brigade is stationed at Aldershot, but is available as Eastern Command Reserve.
	One Bde.Gp. 2 London Div. (a)	4	-	
	1st London Div.	4	-	
	12th Div. R.A.	6	-	
	147th Regt. R.A.	2	2	
	20th Infantry Bde. (b)	-	-	

(contd. over)

APPENDIX 4 (contd.)

Command	Troops Employed	Guns in Artillery Units 18 pdr. 4.5" How. 25 pdr.	2 pdr. A/T	Tanks	Remarks
Southern	1st Armoured Div. (a) (b)	-	-	203 Light 121 Cruiser	(a) In H.Q. Reserve. (b) 11 Regt. R.H.A. under command 1 Amal. Div. as Div. Artillery.
	12th Army Field Regt. (a)	-	-	-	
Aldershot	1st Canadian Div. (a)	-	8	-	(a) H.Q. Reserve.

Source: WO 166/1: op. cit., May 1940: Appendix A: 'Julius Caesar' Plan, Amendment No. 14, 3 May 1940.

APPENDIX 5: FORMATIONS EMPLOYED FOR THE 'JULIUS CAESAR' PLAN, 22 MAY 1940

Command	Troops Employed	Guns in Artillery Units 18 pdr. 4.5" How. 25 pdr.	2 pdr. A/T	Tanks	Remarks
Scottish	9th (Scottish) Div. (a)	4	11	-	(a) A/T guns provided by 53 A/T Training Regiment.
Northern	54th (E. Anglian) Div. (a)	6	12	-	(a) One Brigade Group to be held in H.Q. Reserve for use in either Northern or Scottish Commands.
	66th (Lancs. & Border) Div. (b)	6	12	-	(b) Of these 6 x 18 pdrs. and 8 x 4.5" Hows. are made up from 23rd and 46th Divisions.
	Two Infantry Bdes., 59 Div.	-	-	-	
	2nd Armoured Div.	-	-	108 Light 7 Medium	
Eastern	18th (E. Anglian) Div.	4	8	-	(a) Less two battalions in London Area.
	2nd London Div. (a)	4	8	-	(b) 147 R.H.A. under command.
	55th (W. Lancs.) Div. (b)	6	12	-	(c) 1 bty. R.H.A. under command.
	20th Armoured Bde. (c)	-	-	-28 Universal Scout Cars	(d) Under Op. control Eastern Command, but not to be used without reference to H.Q. Home Forces.
	43rd (Wessex) Div. (d)	-	-	19	
	15th (Scottish) Div.	6	12	-	
	1st London Div.	4	8	-	
	45th (West Country) Div.	6	12	-	
	12th Div. R.A. under comd.	6	12	-	

(contd. over)

APPENDIX 5 (contd.)

Command	Troops Employed	Guns in Artillery Units 18 pdr. 4.5" How. 25 pdr.	2 pdr. A/T	Tanks	Remarks
Southern	52nd (Lowland) Div. (a) 12th Army Field Regt. (a)	- - -	- - -	- - -	(a) H.Q. Reserve.
Aldershot	1st Canadian Div.	- - -	8	-	H.Q. Reserve.

Source: WO 166/1: op. cit., May 1940: Appendix F: 'Julius Caesar' Plan, Amendment No. 18, 22 May 1940.

APPENDIX 6: FORMATIONS EMPLOYED FOR HOME DEFENCE, 31 MAY 1940

		Guns in Artillery Units			2 pdr.	A/T	A/T Rifles	Bren Carriers	Bren L.M.G.s (d)
		18 pdr.	4.5" How.	25 pdr.					
Divisional Establishment:		-	-	72	48	307		90	590
Command	Unit								
Scottish	9th (Scottish) Div.	4	12	-	8	307		-	590
	1 bty., 51 Regt. R.A.	-	-	12	-				
	151, 152, 155, 156 Fd. Regts. R.A.	8	14	-	-				
	49th Div. Artillery	-	-	72	-				
Northern	54th (E. Anglian) Div.	6	12	12	4	154(e)		63	590
	66th (Lancs. & Border) Div.	6	12	12	2	47(e)		63(c)	590
	One inf. bde., 59th Div.	-	-	-	-				
	23rd & 46th Div. Artillery	6	20	-	4				
	2nd Armoured Div.	4	4	-	2				
	150, 153, 154 Fd. Regts. R.A.	6	12	-	-				
Eastern	18th (E. Anglian) Div.	4	8	-	-	47(e)		-	407
	2nd London Div.	4	8	-	2	47(e)		21(c)	?
	55th (W. Lancs.) Div.	4	8	8	2	47(e)		-	?
	47 Regt. R.H.A.	18	4	-	-				
	20th Armoured Brigade	-	-	-	-				

(contd. over)

APPENDIX 6 (contd.)

Command	Unit	Guns in Artillery Units		2 pdr.	A/T	A/T	Rifles	Bren Carriers	Bren L.M.G.'s ^d
		18 pdr.	4.5" How.	25 pdr.	A/T				
Eastern (contd.)	11 Regt. R.E.A.	-	-	8	-				
	43rd (Wessex) Div. (a)	-	-	48	8	307	90		590
	15th (Scottish) Div.	6	12	-	4	47(e)	63(c)		590
	1st London Div.	4	8	11	-	47(e)	21(c)		?
	45th (West Country) Div.	6	12	12	6	154(e)	63(c)		590
	12th Div. Artillery	6	12	-	-				
Southern	52nd (Lowland) Div. (a)	-	-	16	12	307	90		590
	12 Fd. Regt. R.A.	-	-	12	2				
	61st (S. Midland) Div.	6	12	-	2	47(e)	21(c)		?
	143, 144 Fd. Regts. R.A. (b)	-	-	8	-				
Aldershot	1st Canadian Div. (a)	-	-	48	36	307	90		590
	8, 11 Canadian Fd. Regts. (b)	-	-	16	-				
	58 A/T Regt. (less 2 btys.)	-	-	-	24				
Western	59th (Staffs.) Div. (two bdes.)	4	7	-	-	47(e)	21(c)		?
	38th (Welsh) Div.	6	8	-	2	47(e)	-		?
	137, 149 Fd. Regts. R.A.	2	8	-	-				
	66 A/T Regt.	-	-	-	2				
Equipment Totals:		110	193	295 (598)	122	1,959	606		7,500

APPENDIX 6 (contd.)

Notes:

- (a) In course of completion to 72 x 25 pdrs. and 48 x 2 pdrs.. Divisions make up IV Corps, in G.H.Q. Reserve.
- (b) In course of completion to 24 x 25 pdrs.
- (c) Completion of Bren Carriers to these scales expected within a month.
- (d) Where figures not given, completion depends on production (approx. 500 weekly).
- (e) In course of completion to these scales (production approx. 350 weekly).

Source: CAB 80/12: COS(40)417, Forces for the Defence of the United Kingdom, Memoranda by C.-in-C., Home Forces,
31 May 1940.

APPENDIX 7: TANKS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, 10 JUNE 1940

Distribution	Light Tanks		Cruiser Tanks A9, A10, A13	Infantry Tanks	
	Wheeled	Tracked		Mk. I	Mk. II
With Units:					
2nd Armoured Div.	-	197	-	-	-
Fife & Forfar Yeomanry	-	28	-	-	-
20th Armoured Brigade	38	31	-	-	-
8 R.T.R.	-	7	-	27	23
21st Army Tank Brigade	-	)	-	-	16
23rd Army Tank Brigade	-	)	-	-	4
24th Army Tank Brigade	-	)	-	-	4
Other R.T.C. Units	-)	-	-	-
Total with Units: (404)	38	292	-	27	47
Not with Units:					
In depots being completed or repaired	3	90	82	4	20
In schools and training	2	65	21	4	12
Total not with Units: (303)	5	155	103	8	32
Grand Total: (707)	43	447	103	35	79

Notes: In addition, there were perhaps some 131 obsolete light tanks and 132 obsolete medium tanks in the United Kingdom, making a grand total of approximately 970 in all.

In June, tank production amounted to about 15 light-wheeled tanks; 23 light tanks; 62 A10, A13 and a few A9 Cruisers; and 50 Infantry tanks, almost all Matilda Mk. II's apart from three Matilda Mk. I's whose production was being phased out.

Source: CAB 70/1: DC(S)(40)4th, Annexe, Statement of Tank Position as known on 10 June 1940, 11 June 1940.

APPENDIX 8: INFANTRY TANKS IN THE HANDS OF THE TROOPS IN THE U.K., 12 JUNE - 3 SEPT. 1940

Unit	12 June		26 June		10 July		24 July		6 August			20 August			3 Sept.		
	Mk. I	Mk. II	Mk. I	Mk. II	Mk. I	Mk. II	Mk. I	Mk. II	Mk. I	Mk. II	Mk. III	Mk. I	Mk. II	Mk. III	Mk. I	Mk. II	Mk. III
1st Army Tank Brigade:	-	-	-	18	-	18	-	47	-	50	-	-	50	-	-	50	-
	-	-	-	17	-	33	-	38	-	34	16	(a)					
	27	23	27	23	27	23	27	23	27	23	-	27	23	-	27	23	-
21st Army Tank Brigade:	-	4	-	4	-	4	-	4	-	4	-	-	4	-	-	5	-
	-	10	-	10	-	8	-	10	-	31	2	-	34(b)	18(b)	-	50	-
	-	2	-	2	-	4	-	2	-	4	6	-	4	14	-	-	34
	-	4	-	3	-	3	-	3	-	3	-	-	3	-	-	3	-
23rd Army Tank Brigade	-	4	-	3	-	3	-	3	-	3	-	-	3	-	-	3	-
24th Army Tank Brigade	-	4	-	3	-	3	-	3	-	3	-	-	3	-	-	3	-
Totals of types:	27	47	27	80	27	96	27	130	27	152	24	27	121	32	27	134	34
Grand totals for each week:	74		107		123		157		203			180			195(c)		

Notes: (a) 7 R.T.R. (50 x Matilda Mk. IIA) sent as reinforcement to Middle East, departing mid August.

(b) Figures include transfer of 26 x Matilda Mk. IIA to 7 R.T.R., and receipt from 7 R.T.R. of 10 x Matilda Mk. II and 16 x Valentine Mk. III.

(c) In addition, 8 x Matilda Mk. II and 9 x Valentine Mk. III are at the ordnance depot at Chilwell awaiting issue to Units.

Source: CAB 70/2: War Cabinet Defence Committee (Supply) Memoranda, June-Sept. 1940.

APPENDIX 9: TANKS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, 1 JULY 1940

Distribution:	Light Tanks		Cruiser Tanks	Infantry Tanks	
	Wheeled	Tracked		Mk. I	Mk. II Mk. III
1st Armd. Div. { 3 Armd. Bde.	-	25	66	-	-
2nd Armd. Div. { 1 Armd. Bde.	-	178	-	-	-
3 R.T.R.	-	7	52	-	-
20th Armd. Bde. (under command of 1 Armd. Div.)	52	35	-	-	-
1st Army Tank Bde.	-	} 20	-	27	70
21st Army Tank Bde.	-		-	-	16
23rd Army Tank Bde.	-		-	-	3
24th Army Tank Bde.	-		-	-	3
Total with Units: (554)	52	265	118	27	92

Notes: 1) Decrease in total of light tanks with units is due to departure of 2nd Rifle and Forfar Yeomanry, with approximately 28 light tanks, to Northern Ireland in late June.

2) In addition, there were in depots awaiting issue or under repair at this time about 98 wheeled or tracked light tanks, 29 Cruiser tanks and 22 Infantry tanks. With a further 252 non-operational tanks used for training or experimental purposes in the United Kingdom, this gives a grand total of approximately 955 in all (excluding those now in Northern Ireland).

3) 'Wheeled' tanks are Tanks, Light, wheeled, Guy Mk.I's, of which Guy produced 101 examples by October 1940 when production ceased. These were, in fact, four-wheeled armoured cars (predecessors of the later Humber series) armed only with a heavy and a lighter Besa machine gun.

4) Priority in re-equipment of Cruiser tanks was given first to 3 R.T.R., then to the two battalions, 2 R.T.R. and 5 R.T.R., making up 3 Armd. Bde. in 1st Armd. Division. Priority in re-equipment of (contd. over)

APPENDIX 2 (contd.)

Infantry tanks was given first to the remaining two battalions, 4 R.T.R. and 7 R.T.R., of 1st Army Tank Bde., the Brigade's third battalion, 8 R.T.R., having remained in England for Home Defence, thus escaping the débacle in France.

Sources: CAB 70/1: DC(S)(40)14th:1, 6 August 1940.

CAB 70/2: DC(S)(40)18: 'I' Tanks in the Hands of the Troops (Periodical Report), 3 July 1940.

Liddell Hart Collection: 1/292/177b: Some Notes and Queries on 'Hitler Invades' by C. S. Forester, pp. 59-60, 1959.

APPENDIX 10: TANKS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, 4 AUGUST 1940

Distribution:		Light Tanks		Cruiser Tanks	Infantry Tanks	
With Units:		Wheeled	Tracked	A 9, A 10, A 13	Mk. I	Mk. II Mk. III
1st Armd. Div.	{ 3 Armd. Bde.	-	≈ 25	104	-	-
2nd Armd. Div.	{ 1 Armd. Bde. 22 Armd. Bde.	-	≈ 226	17	-	-
3 R.T.R.		-	7	52	-	-
20th Armd. Bde. (under command of 1 Armd. Div.)		59	≈ 52	-	-	-
1st Army Tank Bde. (less 7 R.T.R.)		-	} ≈ 26	-	27	73
7 R.T.R.		-		-	-	54
21st Army Tank Bde.		-		-	-	33
23rd Army Tank Bde.		-		-	-	3
24th Army Tank Bde.		-	-	-	-	3
Total with Units: (757)		59	336	173	27	146
						16

- Notes:
- 1) With the completion of re-equipping 3 Armd. Bde. (two battalions) with Cruiser tanks and 20 Armd. Bde. (two battalions) with light tanks and armoured cars in 1st Armd. Division by the end of July, priority was then given to bringing 2nd Armd. Division (1 and 22 Armd. Bdes., each three regiments strong) up to establishment in Cruiser tanks, though most of these regiments still had to be equipped with light tanks due to the shortage of Cruisers.
 - 2) With the completion of re-equipping 1st Army Tank Brigade (three, then two battalions strong) with Infantry tanks by the end of July, priority was then given to bringing 21st Army Tank Bde. (three battalions strong) up to establishment.

Sources: C4B 70/1: DC(S)(40)14th:1, 6 August 1940.
C4B 70/2: DC(S)(40)30 & 39: 'I' Tanks in the Hands of the Troops (Periodical Report), 31 July & 6 August 1940.

APPENDIX 11: TANKS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, 27 AUGUST 1940

Distribution:	Light Tanks		Cruiser Tanks	Infantry Tanks		
	Wheeled	Tracked		Mk. I	Mk. II	Mk. III
1st Armd. Div. { 3 Armd. Bde.	-	≈ 25	104	-	-	-
2nd Armd. Div. { 1 Armd. Bde. 22 Armd. Bde.	-	≈ 240	34	-	-	-
20th Armd. Bde. (under command of 1 Armd. Div.)	60	-	-	-	-	-
1st Army Tank Bde.	-	} ≈ 30	-	27	73	-
21st Army Tank Bde.	-		-	-	46	33
23rd Army Tank Bde.	-		-	-	3	-
24th Army Tank Bde.	-		-	-	3	-
Total with Units: (678)	60	295	138	27	125	33

- Notes: 1) Decrease of totals of tanks with units at home is due to departure to the Middle East, on or about 20th August, of:-
- (a) 7 R.T.R. (50 Infantry Tanks Mk.II) from Scotland, formerly detached from 1st Army Tank Bde.;
 - (b) 2 R.T.R. (52 Cruiser Tanks) from 1st Armd. Division. Replaced in this division's 3rd Armd. Bde. by the light tank equipped regiment from 20th Armoured Bde.;
 - (c) 3rd (King's Own) Hussars (52 Light Tanks) from 2nd Armd. Division. It was probably replaced in this division's 1st Armd. Bde. by the light tank equipped regiment from 20th Armoured Bde..
- 2) 1st Armd. Division now consisted of 3 Armd. Bde. (3 R.T.R. & 5 R.T.R., fully equipped with Cruiser tanks) and 20 Armd. Bde., now reduced to one regiment of armoured cars, plus the usual support group and divisional troops. Priority in issuing Cruiser tanks was still being given to 2nd Armd. Division which consisted of 1 & 22 Armd. Bdes., each three regiments strong.

(contd. over)

APPENDIX 11 (contd.)

- 3) 1st Army Tank Bde. now consisted only of 4 R.T.R. & 8 R.T.R., though these two battalions were fully equipped. 21st Army Tank Bde., of three battalions, was still receiving priority in equipping with Infantry tanks, including the new Infantry tank Mk.III Valentine, which first made its appearance in this brigade at the beginning of August.

Sources: C.B 70/2: DC(S)(40)54: 'I' Tanks in the Hands of the Troops (Periodical Report), 27 August 1940.

APPENDIX 12: TANKS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, 15 SEPT. 1940

Distribution:	Light Tanks		Cruiser Tanks A 9, A 10, A 13	Infantry Tanks		
	Wheeled	Tracked		Mk.I	Mk.II	Mk.III
1st Armd. Div. { 3 Armd. Bde.	-	25	99	-	-	-
2nd Armd. Div. { 1 Armd. Bde. 22 Armd. Bde.	-	248	55	-	-	-
1st Motor H.G. Bde.	-	-	-	-	-	1
20th Armd. Bde. (under command of 1 Armd. Div.)	64	-	-	-	-	-
1st Army Tank Bde.	-	16	-	27	126	-
21st Army Tank Bde.	-	17	-	-	64	{
23rd Army Tank Bde.	-	-	-	-	3	-
24th Army Tank Bde.	-	-	-	-	3	-
Total with Units: (748)	64	306	154	27	197	

- Notes:
- 1) Priority was still being given to 2nd Armd. Division in Cruiser tanks and to 21st Army Tank Bde. in Infantry tanks, though one of the latter's three battalions (44 R.T.R.) had by now been switched to give 1st Army Tank Bde. a third battalion. The 1st Motor Machine Gun Bde. (three regiments), hitherto equipped with Humberette and Beaverette 'Ironsides' and lorries mounting machine guns, was now to receive its first tanks.
 - 2) The grand total of tanks with units was on 15th September, in fact, still slightly lower than it had been in early August (see Appendix 10), before the departure of the three tank formations to the Middle East. Compared with the figures for 4th August, there were now 30 fewer light and 19 fewer Cruiser tanks, though the total numbers of Infantry tanks had increased by 35.

(contd. over)

APPENDIX 12 (contd.)

- 3) In addition, there were at this time some 480 tanks of various types in the United Kingdom. Some of these were in depots awaiting issue or under repair, but most were non-operational types used for training or experimental purposes. Their inclusion in the figures would give a grand total of over 1,200 tanks in the United Kingdom (excluding Northern Ireland, where there was one light tank-equipped regiment).

Sources: CAB 70/2: DC(S)(40)66: Return of Tanks in the Hands of the Troops in the United Kingdom on 15 September 1940, 18 Sept. 1940.
Liddell Hart Collection 11/4/9/7c (Ismay Papers).

APPENDIX 13: TANKS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, 29 SEPT. 1940

Distribution:	Light Tanks		Cruiser Tanks	Infantry Tanks		
	Wheeled	Tracked		Mk. I	Mk. II	Mk. III
With Units:						
1st Armd. Div. { 2 Armd. Bde. 3 Armd. Bde.	-	23	125	-	-	-
2nd Armd. Div. { 1 Armd. Bde. 22 Armd. Bde.	-	256	54	-	-	-
1st Motor M.G. Bde.	-	-	-	-	-	18
20th Armd. Bde. (under command of 1 Armd. Div.)	64	-	-	-	-	9
1st Army Tank Bde.	-	19	-	27	125	-
21st Army Tank Bde.	-	20	-	-	3	80 {
23rd Army Tank Bde.	-	-	-	-	3	-
24th Army Tank Bde.	-	-	-	-	3	-
Total with Units: (826)	64	318	179	27	238	

- Notes:
- 1) Priority, on completion of equipping one of 2nd Armd. Division's regiments with Cruiser tanks, had now switched to equipping 2nd Armd. Bde., again under command of 1st Armd. Division, with Cruiser tanks. Priority in delivery of Infantry tanks still lay with 21st Army Tank Bde. (mostly Matilda Mk.II's), although the new Valentine tanks were being issued, due to the slow production of Cruiser tanks, to both 1st Motor Machine-Gun Bde. (re-designated 26th Armd. Bde. in early October 1940) and 20th Armd. Bde..
 - 2) In early October, 6th Armd. Division was formed, at first comprising 26th Armd. Bde. only. Later in October, 20th Armd. Bde. was also added, both brigades receiving the new Valentine tanks in lieu of Cruisers. Further Valentine tanks were transferred from 21st Army Tank Bde. during October to 6th Armd. Division, being replaced by new Matilda Mk.II's.
 - 3) 'Wheeled tanks', actually Guy Mk.I's, were now to be officially re-designated as 'heavy armoured cars'.

Source: CAB 70/2: DC(S)(40)70, Return of Tanks in the Hands of the Troops in the U.K. on 29 Sept. 1940, 1 Oct. 1940.

APPENDIX 14: TANKS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, 20 OCT. 1940

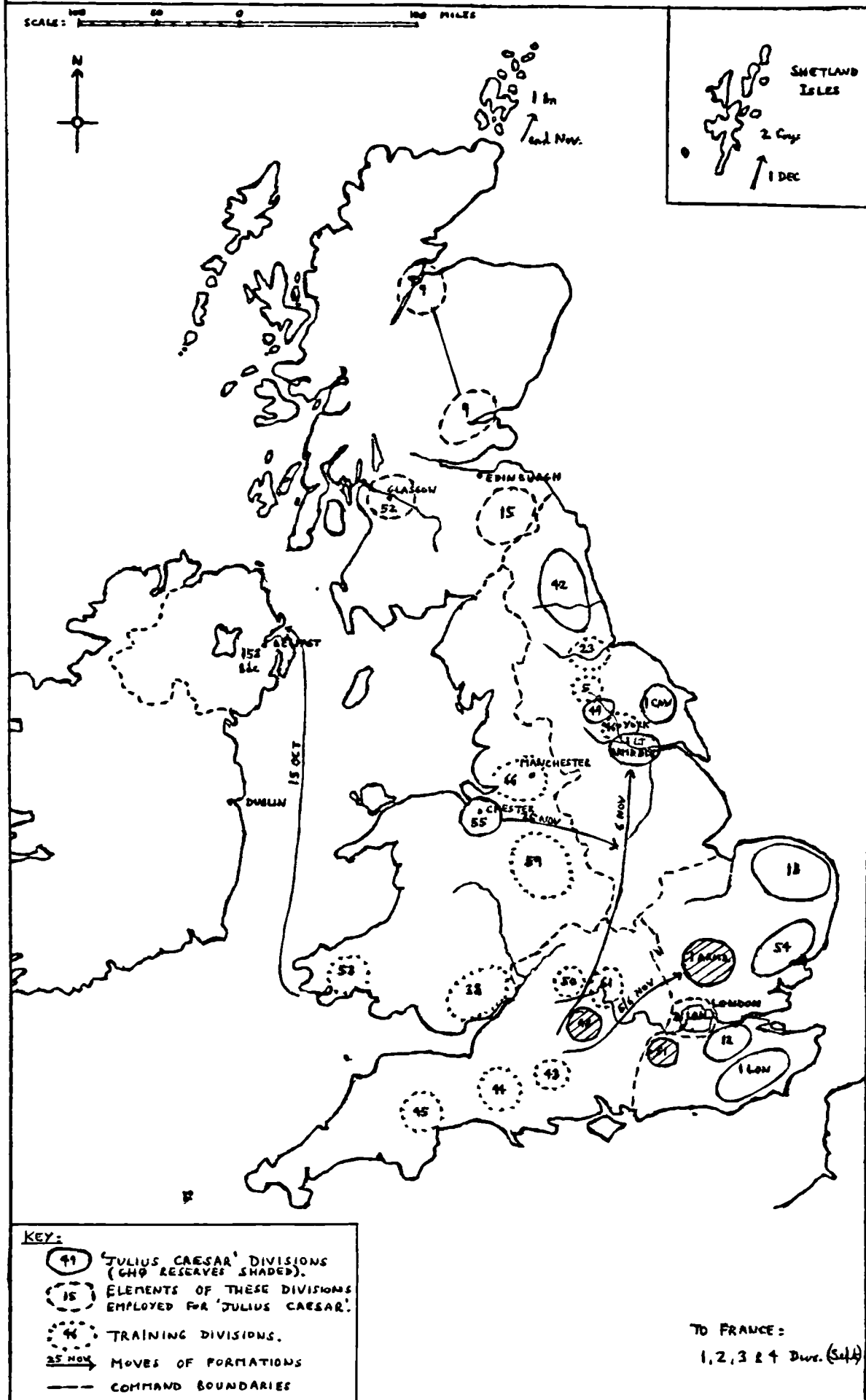
Distribution:		Light Tanks		Cruiser Tanks A 9, A 10, A 13	Infantry Tanks	
With Units:		Heavy Armd. Cars	Tracked		Mk.I	Mk.II Mk.III
1st Armd. Div.	(2 Armd. Bde. 3 Armd. Bde.	-	18	133	-	-
2nd Armd. Div.	(1 Armd. Bde. 22 Armd. Bde.	-	269	65	-	-
6th Armd. Div.	(20 Armd. Bde. 26 Armd. Bde.	64	-	-	-	81
1st Army Tank Bde.		-	23	-	27	126
21st Army Tank Bde.		-	16	-	-	91 {
23rd Army Tank Bde.		-	-	-	-	3
24th Army Tank Bde.		-	-	-	-	3
Total with Units: (919)		64	326	198	27	304

Notes: 1) Priority by now lay with both 1st and 2nd Armd. Divisions in Cruiser tanks, with the newly formed 6th Armd. Division in Valentine tanks and with 21st Army Tank Brigade in receiving new Matilda Mk.II's.

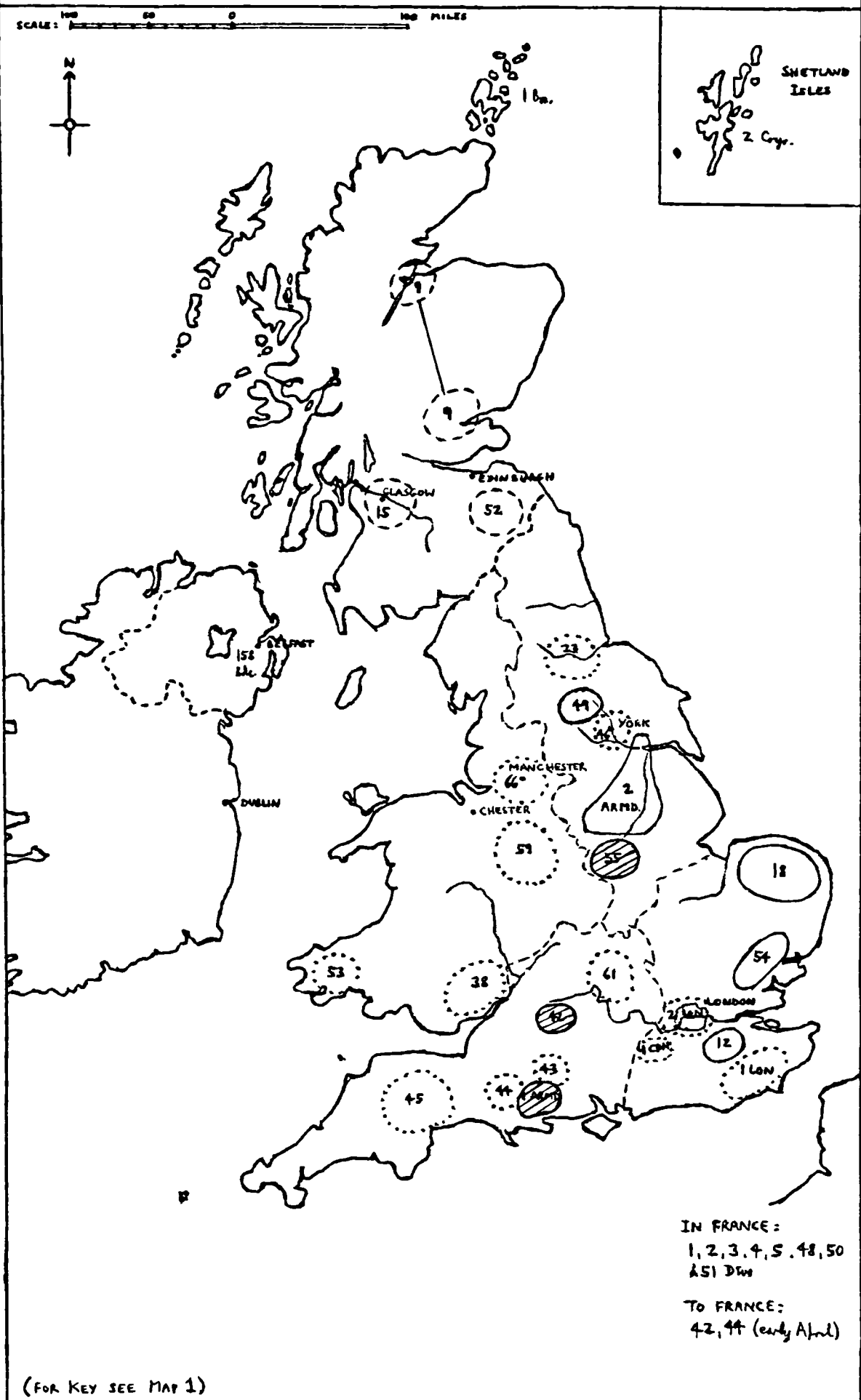
2) By the beginning of November, with the threat of invasion fast receding, there were to be major withdrawals of Cruiser tanks from 1st Armd. Division, partly to bring 2nd Armoured Division up to strength for its departure for the Middle East and partly for issue to units that were to form subsequent Armd. Divisions in the United Kingdom. At the same time, a withdrawal of some Matilda II tanks was made from 1st Army Tank Bde. (20 tanks) as reinforcements to the Middle East and to the garrison of Malta.

Source: CAB 70/2: DC(S)(40)80, Return of Tanks in the Hands of the Troops in the United Kingdom on 20 Oct. 1940, 23 October 1940.

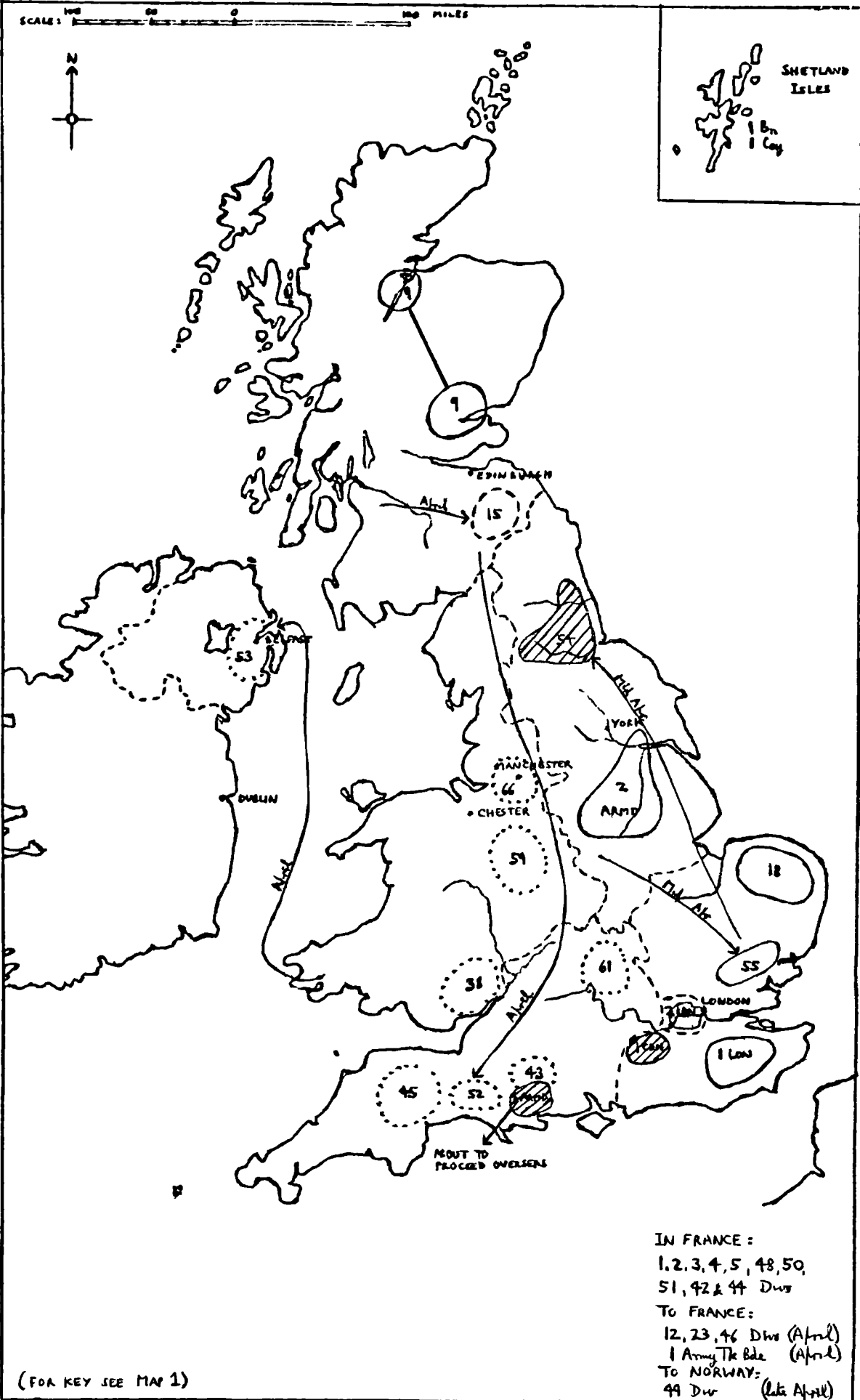
MAP 1: DISPOSITION OF HOME FORCES, NOVEMBER 1939.



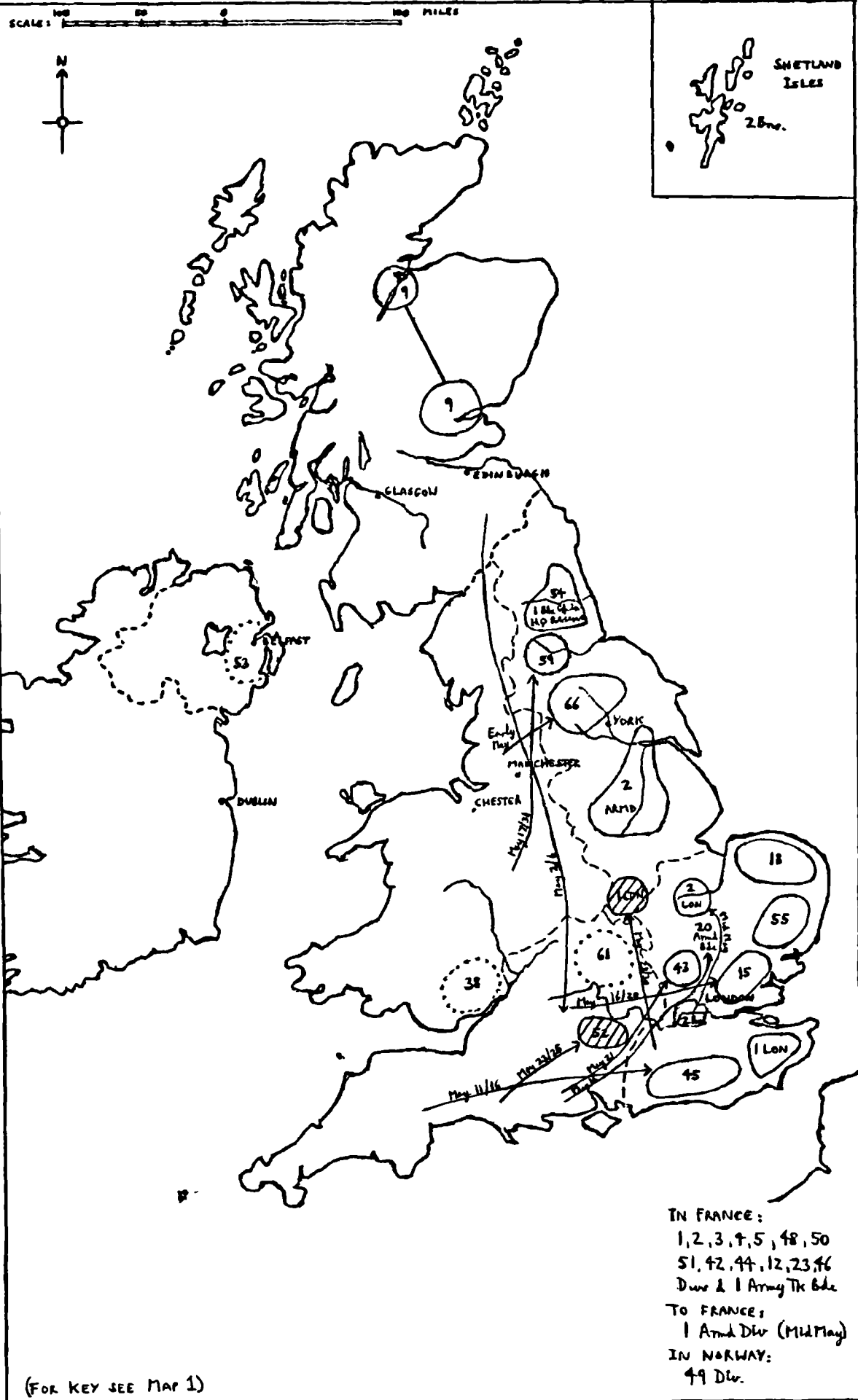
MAP 3 : DISPOSITION OF HOME FORCES, MARCH 1940.



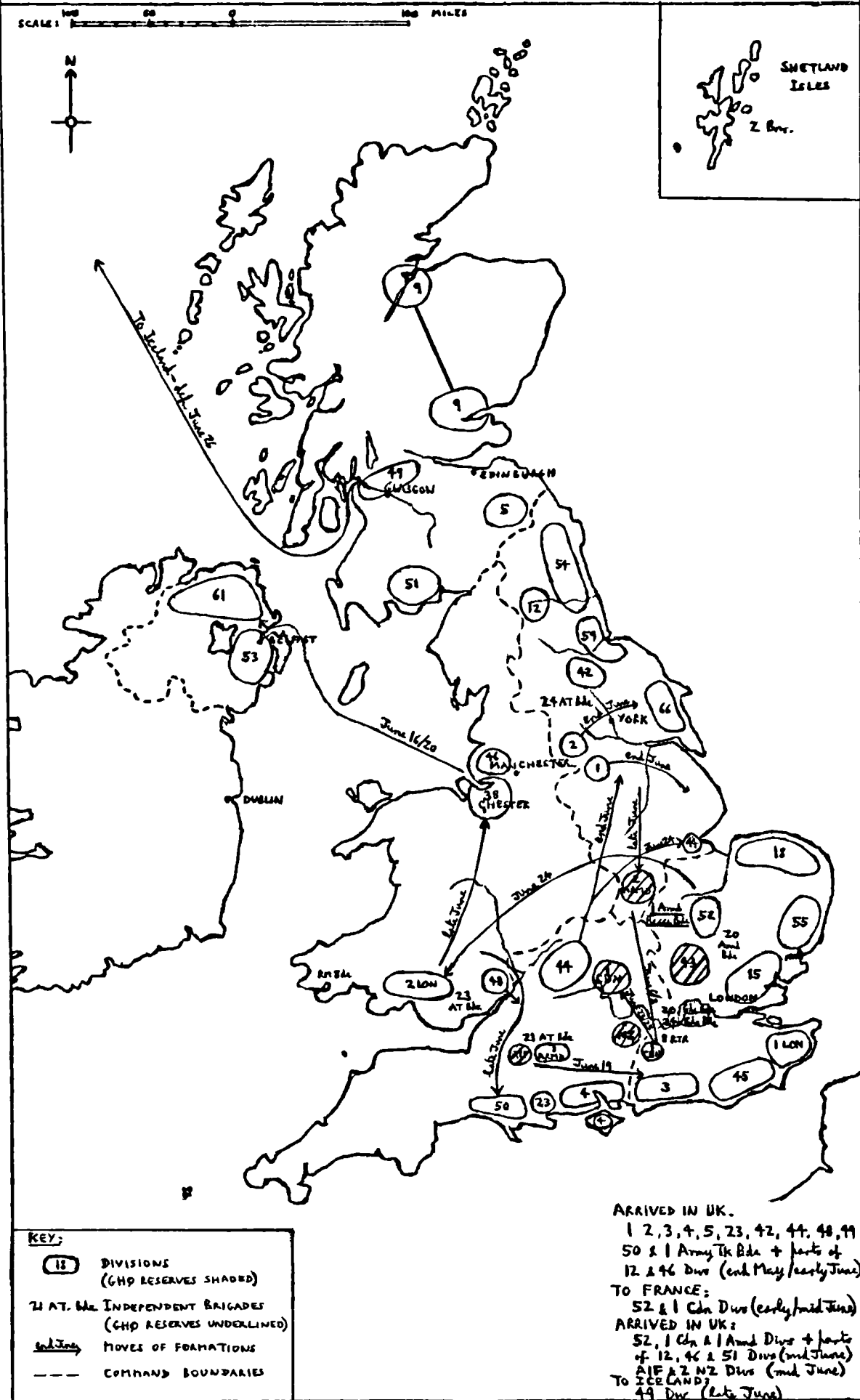
MAP 4 : DISPOSITION OF HOME FORCES, 3RD MAY 1940.



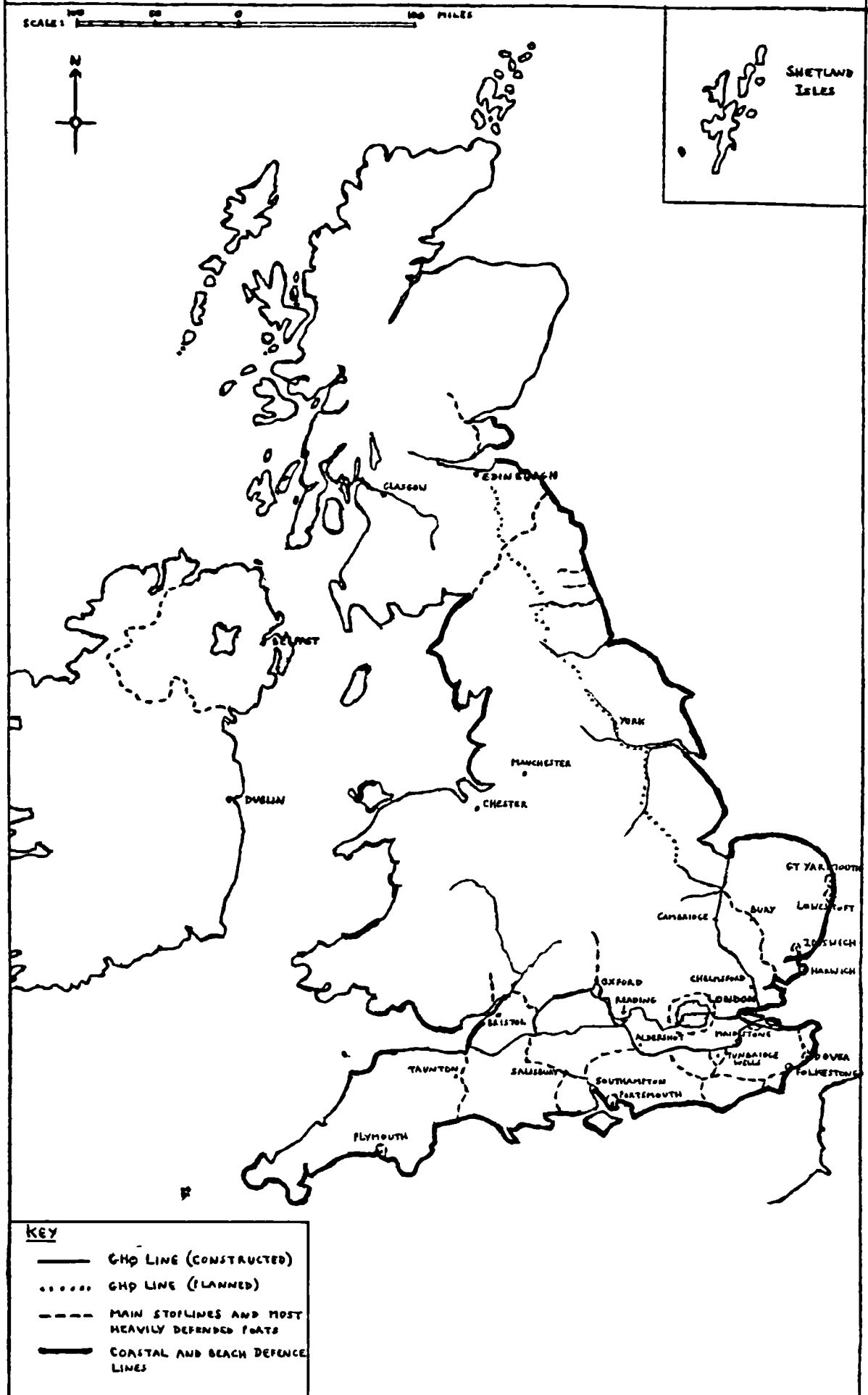
MAP 5. DISPOSITION OF HOME FORCES, 31st MAY 1940.



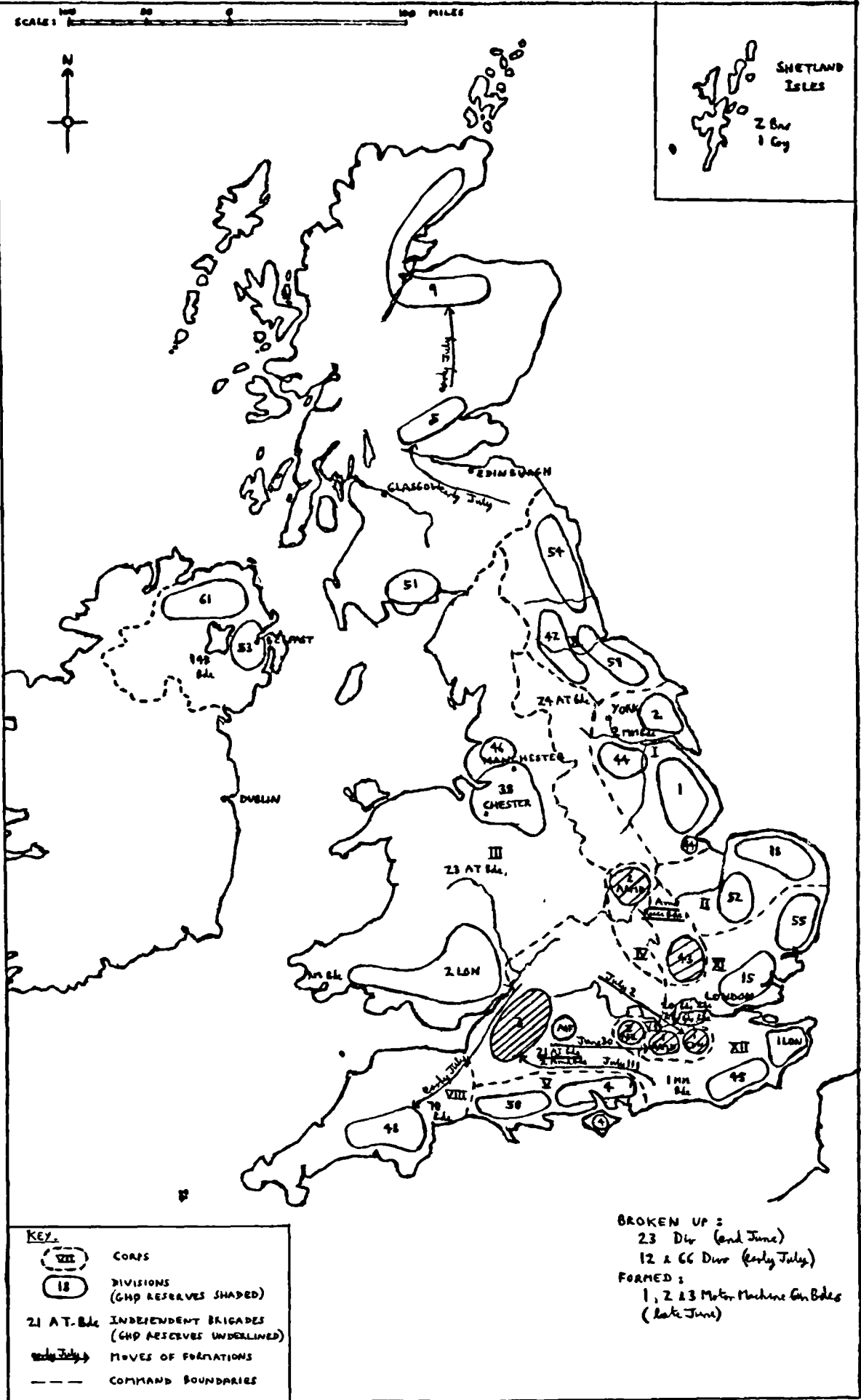
MAP 6: DISPOSITION OF HOME FORCES, 28TH JUNE 1940



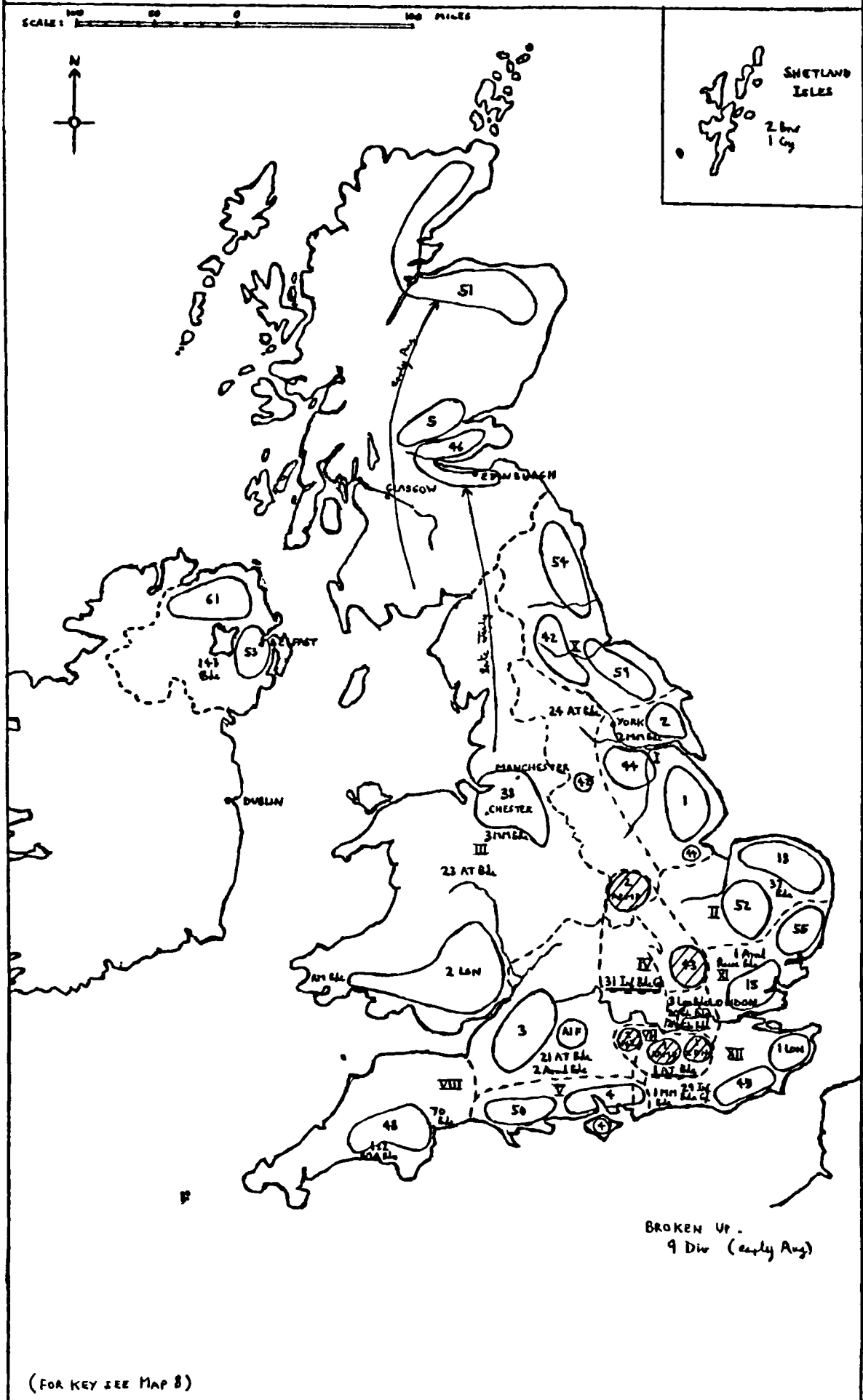
MAP 7: STATIC DEFENCE LINES, JULY 1940



MAP 8 : DISPOSITION OF HOME FORCES, 20th JULY 1940

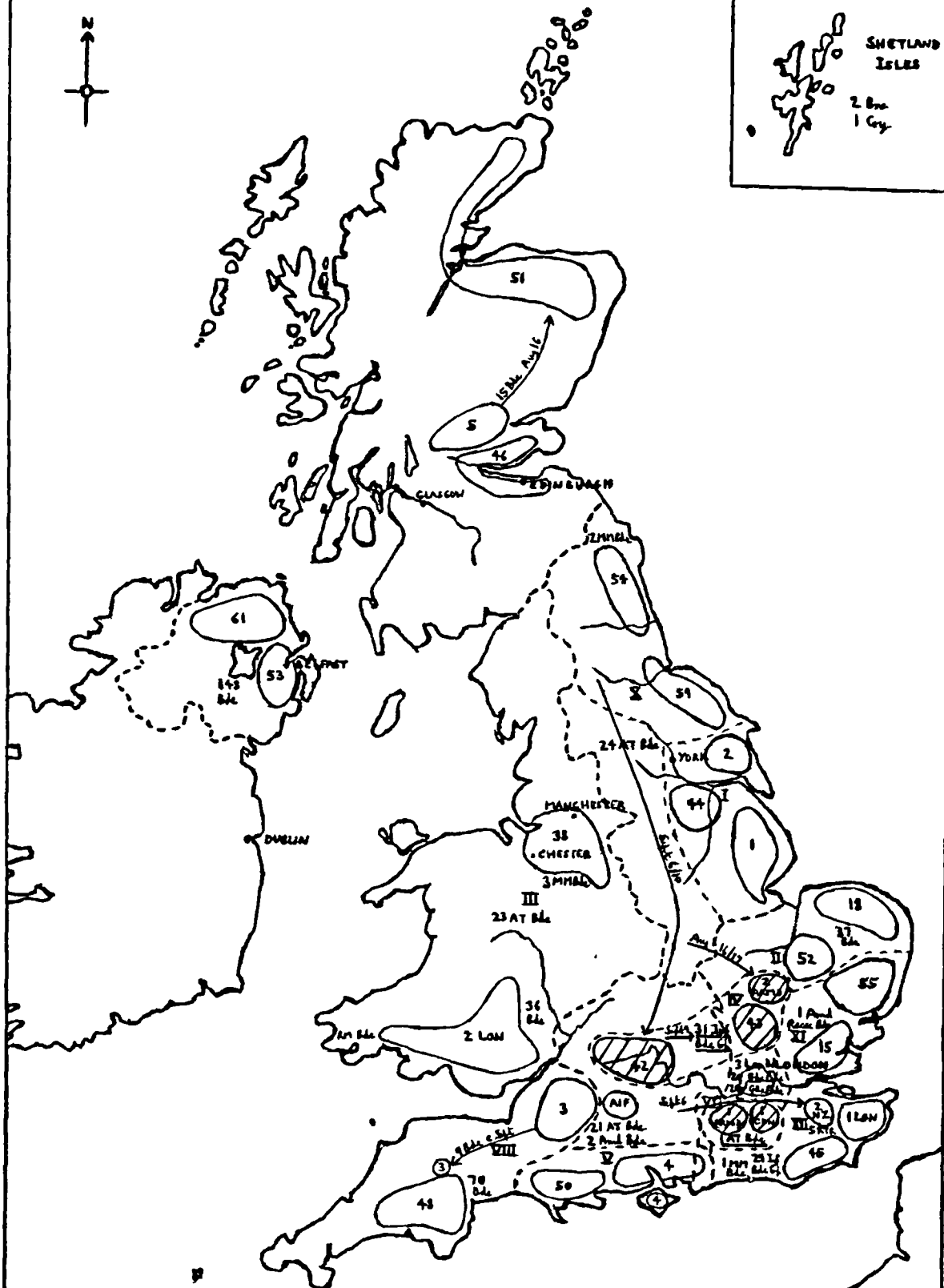
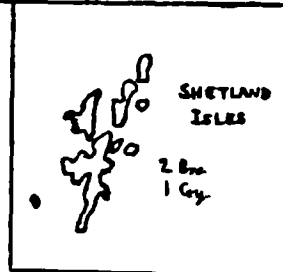


MAP 9 : DISPOSITION OF HOME FORCES, 14TH AUG 1940



MAP 10: DISPOSITION OF HOME FORCES, 11 TH SEPT 1940

SCALE: 100 50 0 50 100 MILES



(FOR KEY SEE MAP 8)

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